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IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS



GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

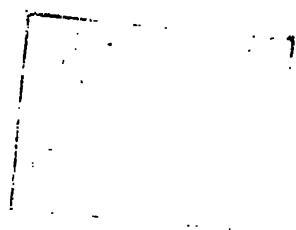




IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

A Romance of Old Virginia







SO THE PAIR STAYED ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP.—*Page 64.*

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

A ROMANCE OF OLD VIRGINIA

BY
GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK T. MERRILL

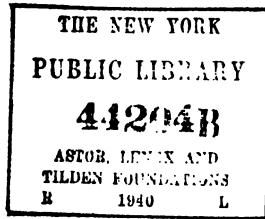


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IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

List of Illustrations

SO THE PAIR STAYED ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP (Page 64)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
HE CHARGED FURIOUSLY	28
"LEM! LEM FULCHER! COME HERE!" . . .	148
"THEY WILL BE WORTHIER, IF YOU LEND THEM THE GRACE OF YOUR ACCEPTANCE" . . .	214
"BILL STANLEY, YOU'S A LIAR"	308
"EVENIN', STRANGER. 'LIGHT AN' LOOK AT YOUR SADDLE"	366

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Irene of the Mountains

I

JUDY PETERS stood with arms akimbo, by what remained of a worm fence from which top rails had been taken from time to time for fire wood — when habitual procrastination had let the regular wood pile dwindle to nothingness.

The fence surrounded Judy's two-storied double log house. There was no gate in it to afford easy ingress and egress. "Them as can't hop over a fence can climb over" was Judy's ready reply when asked why she had no gate or draw bars in the barrier round her house grounds; "an' them as don't like Judy Peters's way o' havin' things an' doin' things, can jest stay at home."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 3

dress," she said to her daughter Sapphira, who had joined her at the fence after seeing that the kettle of jowl and "collards" (*anglice*, coleworts) was vigorously boiling.

"It's awful purty," said the girl admiringly. Then suddenly she added:

"Somebody's a comin'. I seed him at the turn o' the road down there by William Coffey son to Jeemes's place."

For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with life in that part of the Virginia Mountains in which Judy Peters's farm lay, it should be explained that there dwelt in that region so great a number Coffeys, Camdens, Masseys, and others that their names were multiplied sometimes by four, five or six, and in some cases by eight or ten. In order to distinguish one from the other, on the polling books and elsewhere, it was the practice to add their several fathers' names to their own. Thus one was "William Coffey, son to James," another "William Coffey, son to Jesse," and so on with all the Williams, Jameses, Jesses, Edmunds, etc. There were other family names in the mountains, less numerously represented

4 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

than the Coffeys, indeed, but still so numerous as to require distinction in this fashion.

"What's he a totin'?" asked Judy.

"I couldn't ezac'ly make out. I reckon 'twas a bar'l o' some sort; seemed heavy."

"H'm. Runlet o' whiskey most like. Ef so it's Morris Bryant, an' I'll make him sweat fer that."

"Reckon he's a sweatin' fer it a'ready. Tain't no fun to tote a twenty gallon runlet o' whiskey on your shoulders fer seven mile up the mounting."

The mountaineers were always particular to call mountains "mountings."

"Don't you be a givin' me none o' your sass, Sapphiry, or you'll git mighty sorry fer it pretty soon. When you want to crack jokes, you jest take somebody else 'an me fer a cracker. Go an' set the table. Put on things fer the two candidates. Git a clean sheet fer the table an' set on the chaney dishes, do you hear?"

"Chaney" was the accepted word form for "china" in the mountains.

The girl rather sullenly obeyed, moving

slowly toward the house. By way of hurrying her Judy picked up a stone — a rock she would have called it — and hurled it after her, with such precision of aim that it almost brushed the girl's cheek.

It seemed obvious that Judy Peters was a disciplinarian, and a person of imperious mind, accustomed to enforce obedience, and a trifle reckless as to the means employed to that end. The girl was convinced also that her mother's temper was "riled" at the moment, as in fact it was. For as he rounded the next visible turn of the road below, Judy had seen the oncoming Morris Bryant plainly, and had discovered beyond a doubt that the burden he bore upon his bent shoulders was, as she had conjectured, a large runlet of whiskey — a fact that greatly perturbed her spirit. Not that Judy cherished any prejudices against alcoholic liquor or the abundant consumption thereof, for indeed she was accustomed to take her toddy several times a day, and upon festive occasions she could "drink down" the most hardened old soak in all the mountain region round about. She had other reasons

8 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

what I was a goin' to say, which it was this, that I ain't been a buyin' no whiskey, ner a doin' nothin' else as you can call stuck up. That's a whiskey runlet, an' it's full o' whiskey, an' I toted it up the mounting fer shore, but 'tain't none o' mine. It's your'n."

"Mine? How's that?"

"Well you see I was down thar round Ar-in'ton a helpin' to load tobacco hogsheads on the cars, an' a gittin' a dollar a day, all but a quarter, with my keep throw'd in, an' when the job was done, w'y that thar Allen feller what's been enominated fer senator from this here distric' he comes to me an' he says, says he: 'Mr. Bryant,' — shore 'nough, Judy, he called me mister, polite like, — 'Mr. Bryant,' says he, 'how is my good friend Mrs. Judy Peters this here fall?' An' when I tole him you was a bloomin' on the same ole bush, he says, says he, 'Well, I'm a goin' up fer to see her purty soon, an' I reckon I'll impose a good deal on her hospitality endurin' o' the campaign,' says he, 'so I'm a goin' to send her a little present, jest fer fa'r an' squar like.' Then he axed me could I tote this here runlet up the mounting

fer half a dollar, an' course I said I could an' I would. That's jes' all they is about it, Judy, an' ef you'll show me whar you want it put, I'll set it up on skids an' put a spigot in it so's it'll be handy when you's a min' to draw."

Half an hour later Morris took his way toward his own cabin, with a mind relieved by his restoration to a state of grace in Judy's eyes, and with a soul gladdened by the three stiff drinks she had given him of the spirits.

As for Judy, he left her at peace with all the world, even with Sapphira, to whom she generously gave a large lump of precious loaf sugar moistened with whiskey.

Strangely enough Judy's reconciliation with her environment had come just when the sorest of that day's disappointments pressed itself upon her. Morris Bryant had told her he "reckoned the candidates fer Gov'nor" wouldn't visit her until the next evening, as they had arranged to have what Morris described as a "j'int speakin' match" at a county seat twenty miles away on the next day. Ordinarily such a disappointment would have angered her mightily, not because she had killed

10 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

a lot of chickens, "fryin' size," for their consumption, and had made that peculiar dessert dish — an open crust with three inches of apples and cream in alternate layers within it — which was called an apple pie in Virginia, but because it was her practice to exact a prompt visit from every candidate for office in that region, in order that she might choose between the rival aspirants and decide which of them should receive the votes of the mountaineers, a body of voters great enough in number to decide any election between the Whig and Democratic parties. Having learned that the gubernatorial candidates were planning to visit her she expected them to be similarly prompt in coming. The political subdivision within which Judy's farm lay, embraced a large area of Piedmont country in which the wealthy plantation owners lived and ruled, and about an equal area of mountains, where Judy Peters played the part of absolute boss of both parties.

The mountaineers were rough, uneducated, even illiterate folk for the most part. They owned no negroes, and their steep rocky farms were small. They were intensely jealous of the

planter people below. They were a generous, unthriftly, hard-working set, full of physical health and vigor, and so proud of their muscular strength — which was indeed remarkable — that in their sports and even at their social functions, contests of prowess in lifting, wrestling and other feats of strength and endurance, constituted their principal amusement. They were in most cases too poor to waste ammunition in the killing of squirrels, rabbits and other small game, but their skill in throwing “rocks” was so great that they filled bags of such game as easily and quickly as more pretentious sportsmen could when armed with double barrelled shot guns. For bigger game every family had a long rifle and every man and boy among them knew how to use it with deadly precision.

Over the majority of these mountain folk, Judy Peters’s authority was absolute. She was called “the Queen of the Mountains,” and there were very few who dared dispute her commands.

It would be difficult to say upon what her influence rested. She had the largest and very

12 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

greatly the best farm in the mountains, so that in such a community she was accounted rich, but wealth counted for little among those sturdily independent people. Perhaps a more important circumstance was that she was the undisputed head of her family, and by virtue of generations of intermarriage, her family and its connections embraced practically the entire mountain population.

Whatever its source might be, her authority was absolute and its exercise easy. Her word was law, and in the very few cases in which disobedience was attempted, she was judge, jury, prosecutor and executioner all in one.

Her methods of punishment were peculiar and original. She rarely resorted to the same device twice. She always had some new and totally unexpected way of manifesting her displeasure and bringing a recalcitrant subject to repentance, so that the terrors of uncertainty were added to the punishment itself, whatever it might be.

Thus on one occasion, she kept an offender waiting for three weeks in apprehension; then, when all the mountain folk were gathered to

hear a preacher whose gifts of fiery denunciation were such that he was said to "carry a brimstone wallet," she rose in "meetin'" and, after cataloguing some of the offender's most conspicuous sins, asked the Boanerges to "pray for him." The preacher did so, in such fashion that the sinner, as he afterwards confessed, "thought he smelt brimstone an' saw blue blazes a comin' up out'n the floor." The fellow was scornful of religion, especially when in his cups, but in common with the other mountaineers he unquestioningly believed in a personal devil and an ever yawning Hell, hot with actual fire and brimstone. By the time the preacher had finished his prayer, the culprit was on his knees at the mourners' bench, groaning and writhing with the pangs of "conviction."

Judy knew that his repentance and profession of religion would not outlast the next "shindig" held in that region, and that when they should pass away he would suffer tortures of shame over the matter. She planned to emphasize those tortures. She sent for the two greatest wags and most merciless teasers

14 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

among her subjects and quietly suggested that they might "git a lot o' fun out'n Jesse Goodwin's gittin' religion." They appreciated the opportunity and for many months thereafter poor Goodwin suffered a degree of shame and humiliation in comparison with which the pains of damnation, as described by the preacher, seemed to him insignificant.

In politics especially Judy's exercise of her authority was easy. Neither she nor her clients knew or cared anything about the policies of the rival parties. With Judy, politics consisted of a purely personal choice between candidates, a choice based upon their success or failure in making themselves agreeable to her. With her voters politics meant voting as Judy said. Both with her and with them there was an abiding determination to rebuke "stuckuppedness," as a thing especially offensive.

The system of viva voce voting then in use in Virginia, under which each man orally declared what his vote was, and poll clerks wrote it down, rendered it impossible for any of Judy's followers to deceive her in the matter.

She was a boss able to "deliver the goods." Her choice among candidates carried with it votes enough to decide any election for the Senate, the House of Delegates, or local office, within the senatorial district in which she reigned, and so all candidates for such offices made it their first business, after what the mountaineers called their "enomination," to visit Judy with intent to win her favor and convince her that they were not "stuck up," at cost of whatever sacrifice of dignity the task might involve. This year there was a very hot contest for the Governorship of the State, and the balance of parties was so exact that even for that high office Judy's votes were felt to be of great importance. They might perhaps be determinative of the result.

Accordingly for the first time, Judy was expecting a visit from the two statesmen nominated for the governorship. One of them was a lawyer and planter who lived in the Piedmont portion of Judy's Senatorial district. He was quick to see the advantage of a visit to the Queen of the Mountains, and his adversary, learning of his intention, resolved to be

16 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

there with him or before him. It was in anticipation of their coming that Judy had donned her gorgeous gown and brought out her store of "chaney" ware.

She did not relish the news that she must wait for another day for their coming, but the soothing influence of the whiskey sent to her by a Senatorial aspirant, and liberally sampled by her in company with Morris Bryant, enabled her to wait with a good deal of equanimity.

II

JUDY PETERS was not accustomed to abate one jot or tittle of her self-assertion in any presence, however distinguished that presence might be. Indeed the more distinguished a visitor was, the more imperatively she thought her duty to herself and to the people of the mountains required her to emphasize herself. She must show "stuck up" people that their claim to stick themselves up was not recognized at the court of the Queen of the Mountains. In this instance, however, she was deeply impressed by what she called the "toploftiness" of her expected guests. She was well used to the eager obeisances of candidates for the Legislature and aspirants to local offices, but never before had her majesty and her importance as a political force been recognized and emphasized by what she called "'lectioneerin' howdys" on the part of gub-

18 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ernatorial candidates. It would be incorrect to say that she felt herself "honored" by the coming visit, for Judy Peters held her own importance in much too high esteem to regard anybody as capable of conferring honor upon her. But she saw clearly that the coming of these "biggest tadpoles in the puddle," as she called them, would deeply impress the mountaineers with her consequence, and confirm her rule over the mountains.

It was for her own sake, not at all for the sake of her distinguished visitors, that she planned to set out her "chaney" dishes, produce her finest apple butter and serve fried chicken at every meal "endurin' o' their stay." She wished them to understand that "some folks is jes' as good as other folks," and these were agencies for impressing that fact upon their minds.

Judge Talley, one of the gubernatorial candidates, lived upon a plantation not far from the foot of the mountains and within Judy's senatorial district. Judy had twice elected him to the Senate and once to the House of Delegates, but she had also once defeated him for

the Senate. He knew, therefore, the value of her favor, and the very uncertain tenure by which it was held. In this present contest he deeply felt the necessity of securing it at whatever sacrifice of personal dignity. Knowing Judy and her ways as he did, he felt that he had a distinct advantage over his competitor, Colonel Hargreaves, who lived near Richmond, far east of the mountains.

Colonel Hargreaves's friends fully realized this and were insistent in instructing him as to means and methods of "lectioneering" within Judy's bailiwick. They had even stipulated, in accepting Talley's challenge to joint debate, that their candidate should accompany the other on his tour of the mountains.

Accordingly the two met at a little railway station prepared to journey thence up the precipitous mountain road to Judy's house. Colonel Hargreaves had brought a superb horse with him, but the local managers of his campaign hurried it away from the station and stabled it on a plantation at a considerable distance. They explained that if he went into the mountains on horseback while his competitor

20 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

went on foot in mountain fashion, Judy would instantly condemn him as a "stuck up," pampered, vainglorious weakling. In the mountains, roads were bad, saddle horses were few, and the legs of men were apt to be strong, and in the mountains physical strength was held in high esteem as an essential of manhood.

Colonel Hargreaves, in his ignorance and misconception of Judy Peters's attitude of mind, planned also to take to her as a present the goods for a new gown. His local managers promptly vetoed that as a fatal error.

"Judy would instantly conclude," they explained, "that you were trying to buy her votes, and she'd turn her entire following against you."

It was true that Judy had gratefully accepted a candidate's present of the runlet of whiskey. But she had that morning sent Morris Bryant down the mountain to convey her thanks to the giver, which he did in this wise:

"Judy she tole me to tell you she's mighty obleeged fer the whiskey an' likewise fer the runlet, which'll be mighty handy to put apple butter in, when the whiskey's all dranked up;

an' she tole me to tell you she's always a takin' all the good things what's a comin' her way, an' mighty thankful; but she says, says she, as how she never mixes up politics an' politeness, an' she ain't never to be bought ner bribed, an' so, seein's you's a been a tryin' to bribe her she's a goin' to beat you out'n yer boots when 'lection day comes round. But she was partic'lar as I should word it strong like as how she's mighty thankful to you fer the liquor — an' fer the runlet."

The two candidates toilsomely trudged up the steep rocky road, each carrying on a shoulder stick a little parcel done up in a bandanna handkerchief. As they expected to remain for a week or ten days in the mountains each carried in his bundle a few sandwiches, and one change of linen, but only one. To don more than one clean shirt in a week would have subjected them, in the mountains, to very grave suspicion of "stuckuppedness." A night gown would have been a political shroud. Each carried a bottle of whiskey, for use in "treating," a supply of chewing tobacco and very little else.

They sprang over Judy's fence about five

22 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

o'clock in the afternoon. Talley greeted the Queen of the Mountains as an old friend, and deferentially presented Colonel Hargreaves at court.

"I hope to beat him in the election, Judy," he said, "but he's a good fellow and as I live in this district I'm naturally anxious that he shall have as good a time as possible up here."

"Dunno 'bout the beatin'," she replied. "'Llection's a good way off yit. But he seems like a purty decent sort o' chap, an' ef he ain't stuck up an' we likes him arter we gits to knowin' of him, w'y you know a good many things mout happen."

As she spoke Judy was mixing a dram, stirring it diligently with her long, bony fore finger, in order to dissolve the flinty loaf sugar in the bottom of the glass.

"This un's fer you, Talley," she said, "an' I'll mix another fer t'other fellow — what's his name, did you say?"

"Colonel Hargreaves," answered Talley, quickly adding — "you must give him that dram, as he's a stranger and must be served first." He observed a slight flicker of disgust

in his companion's face, as he thus forced the finger stirred dram upon him. "Besides, I'm going to make a mint julep for you and me, Judy. Here's a tall tumbler, that'll hold enough for both, and it'll be sociable like for old friends like you and me to drink together. You see, Judge, I've been indebted to Judy for my election on several occasions and —"

"Yes," chuckled Judy, interrupting, "an' I've 'lected you to stay at home a sight o' times too."

"Oh, yes, of course. But we're old friends and I know where your mint bed and your ice-cold spring are. Besides, I'm going to show you something."

He drew from his pocket a boxwood muddler — a small pestle used by barkeepers in those days in crushing the dampened lumps of sugar in a glass.

"What's that air thing?" asked the woman, inspecting it closely, "an' what's it fer?"

"It's a muddler," he replied, "and I'll show you what it's for."

With that he dropped some lumps of sugar into the tumbler, poured a little water upon

24 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

them, and proceeded to crush and dissolve them.

"It beats a spoon all hollow," he said, "and it saves time when you're in a hurry for your drink. Now wait a minute," pouring a generous supply of spirits into the glass, "wait a minute till I get the ice cold water from the spring and pull a bunch of mint."

When he passed out of the door, Judy proceeded to examine the muddler more closely than before. Then she was seized with a desire to try it in a practical way, and just as Talley reëntered, she took up another tumbler, saying — "I'm mighty thirsty, Talley, an' I'm a goin' to drink all that julep myself. You sha'n't have a drop of it, but I'm a goin' to mix you a dram an' use your muddler a doin' it."

Whether Judy had suspected Talley's fastidiousness as to the use of her finger, and was planning to punish it, or whether her act had some other prompting, is not easily guessed. At any rate, she seized a large piece of sugar that had been chipped off the flint-like loaf, bit off a piece of the desired size, returned the rest of the sugar to the bowl, and, taking

the lump from between her teeth, dropped it into the glass and proceeded to wet and crush it with the muddler.

Talley accepted the glass, and concealing both his disgust and the chagrin he felt over the failure of his little ruse, smilingly swallowed the dram, while Judy placidly sipped the julep he had "built for two."

"Is you a goin' to gim me that thar stick, Talley?" she asked with her nose deeply buried in the fragrant mint bouquet.

"The muddler you mean? No. You see it isn't just the thing for a candidate to be going round making presents, especially to people who control votes. But if you choose just to keep the thing I promise never to raise a row about it, Judy."

"That's the way to talk, Talley," she answered. "They say you mustn't never give any body a knife, ca'se it mout cut friendship, but you can jes' let your friend steal the knife an' it's all right. Reckon it's so with a muddler. Ef you give it t' anybody it mout mash the good feelin' 'twixt you an' them, but jes' lettin' 'em *take* it's differenter."

26 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Not very long after the lavishly abundant supper of fried chicken, soda biscuit, hot waffles with maple syrup, and other dainties, the early mountain bedtime came and the two candidates were assigned to sleep in one high pitched bed.

As they were bidding Judy good night, that outspoken critic said:

“Reckon they must ‘a’ been mighty short o’ timber fer candidates when they had to enominate you two fer Gov’ner.”

III

IT was Hargreaves's plan to sleep that night "with one eye open" and to slip out of bed about daylight leaving Talley to slumber, while he should busy himself helping Judy. But he was weary after the long climb up the mountain, and after a period of wakefulness fell into a slumber so profound that only the sun pouring in upon his face waked him.

Talley was up and doing. Looking out of the window Hargreaves saw his rival struggling to hold a bull calf by the ears while Judy milked its dam. Obviously Talley had got the better of him and he felt that something must be done by way of restoring the equilibrium.

Hastily slipping on his clothes he hurried out to the milking place, where he greeted both

28 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

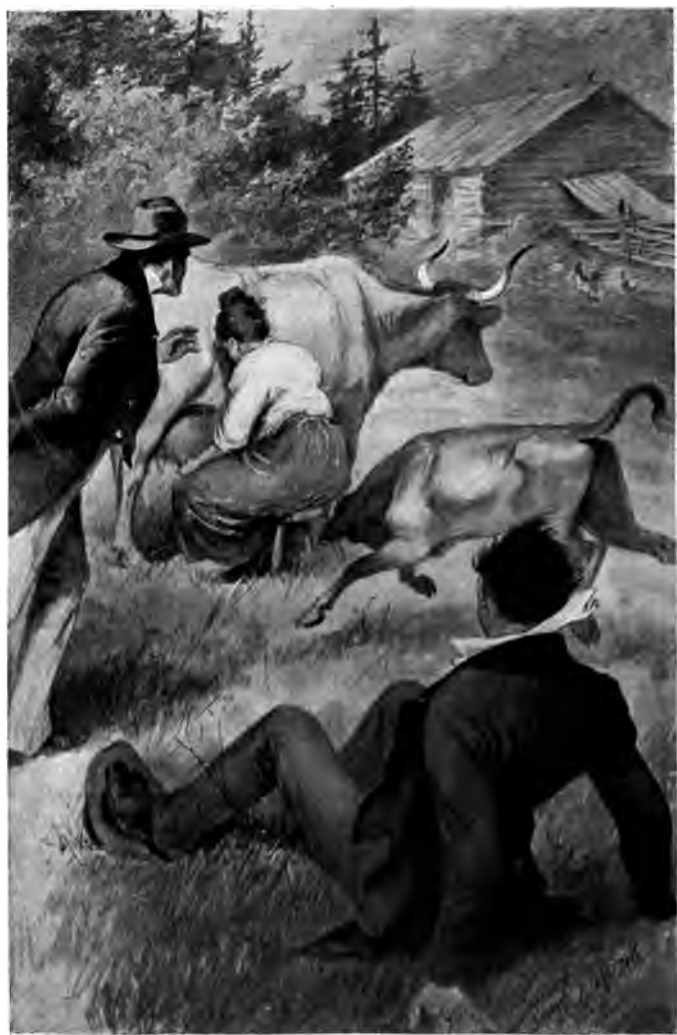
his rival and his hostess with as cheery a good morning as if he had lost no ground in the contest for Judy's favor.

"I overslept myself, Judy," he began, "but you have only yourself to blame for that."

"I reckon you's got some way o' makin' that out, but fer the life o' me I can't seem to see it."

"Why, it's simple enough. You put me to sleep in the very softest and best feather bed I ever saw, and of course I overslept. A thunder storm would have overslept itself in that bed."

As he worked off this adroit bit of flattery he drew from his pocket the red bandanna in which he had carried his luggage on the previous day, and, standing between Judy and Talley, shook it out as if for use. The moment the bull calf saw it waving before his eyes, he charged furiously, knocking Talley down, running over him, and rushing upon Judy, as Hargreaves nimbly stepped out of the way, at the same time concealing the handkerchief, which neither of the others had seen. Judy received the full force of the charge in



HE CHARGED FURIOUSLY.—*Page 28.*

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her back, and she and the overturned milk bucket were piled in a heap.

With a feigned solicitude that suggested histrionic gifts, Hargreaves lifted the prostrate queen and eagerly inquired as to her injuries.

"Oh, I'm not hurt," she answered, "'ceptin' in my feelin's an' the milk bucket." Then turning upon Talley as he picked himself up she gave rein to her vituperative powers.

"What sort o' idjiot is you anyhow, Talley," she inquired with an interest that was not feigned. "You a wantin' to be Gov'ner! You 'spectin' us to 'lect you, when you can't even hold a bull calf! I thought fust off as how they must 'a' been mighty short 'n timber when they enominated sich a small pertater as you is."

Judy's metaphors were apt to be a trifle mixed, especially when her royal wrath was roused, but her meaning was never left in doubt. "You better go back down the mounting where they has niggers to do their milkin' an' hold their bull calves. We ain't got no use up here fer fellers what's got arms made

30 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

o' batter bread dough, let alone fellers what gits theirselves runned over by a bull calf jes' like they was a standin' on a railroad an' didn't know what the whistle was a screechin' fer. You jes' wait till 'lection day. When you hears how the mountings is gone you'll think a whole dozen o' bull calves has runned over you."

Talley did his best to apologize, but Judy wouldn't hear him.

"You's a sort o' lawyer an' you know how to prove as how black's white an' white's black, but fac's is fac's, an' that thar bull calf an' that thar upsot milk bucket is fac's. Come along, Hargreaves, an' git your breakfast. Sapphiry can milk the cows what ain't got no bull calves with nobody fit to hold on to 'em. I reckon you ain't any great shakes yourself, Hargreaves, but anyhow you ain't gone an' made a bull calf run over me. Come an' git your breakfast, Talley. Even ef you can't hold a bull calf I reckon you're strong enough to chaw bacon an' sop up fried eggs with the tender inside of a hot roll. Anyhow you can have a swig o' apple brandy jest to brace you up fer the work o' eatin'."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 31

It wasn't strength that Talley lacked as he sat at the breakfast table, but appetite. The events of the morning had completely robbed him of that very necessary adjunct to a meal. And yet he felt that he must eat, and with apparent relish, too, lest Judy should take new offence. She was a thoroughly good cook, and she was justly proud of her table. If he should seem to find her dishes unpalatable, she would probably drive him out of the mountains in punishment of his offence.

The only crumb of comfort he had in his humiliation, was the reflection that Judy's attitude toward his rival was by no means one of enthusiastic admiration. At best she only tolerated the thought of casting her influence in Hargreaves's favor, as the less offensive of two candidates, both of whom seemed unfit in her critical eyes.

The campaign was just beginning and Talley reflected that there was still an abundance of time in which to devise some scheme of restoration to the royal favor. He was by nature an optimist, and in his present predicament, he decided that there was a world of

32 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

wisdom in the injunction, "Patience, and shuffle the cards."

Consoled by the hope thus awakened in his mind, he regained enough appetite to impart an appearance of flattering relish to his eating. Judy, who was shrewdly observing him, reflected:

"He's got grit, anyhow, an' I like grit in a man. Maybe he's got trumps up his sleeve. Anyhow I'll wait and see."

She ended her reflection in sententious speech:

"I ain't choosed 'twixt you two fellers yit, so you'd both better look out."

The utterance comforted Talley, and somewhat alarmed his rival.

IV

COLONEL Richard Hargreaves was a man of impulsive temperament, and his impulse at this time was stimulated by disgust. To fawn upon this rude, illiterate old hag for the sake of the votes she controlled, to submit to her insults and to play the sycophant to her, seemed to him unworthy of a manhood which he had always cherished as his most precious possession.

"Talley," he said as the two strolled out after breakfast, "I don't know how you feel about it, but it seems to me that you and I are doing all we can to justify Judy's contemptuous opinion of us. If either of us is worthy to be Governor of a justly proud commonwealth, the successor in office of the great men who have been Governors of Virginia, before us, then this sort of thing is utterly unworthy of us, and I for one will have no more of it.

34 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

I'm going on farther into the mountains on a speaking tour, appealing to men's minds and consciences, and not to their prejudices. If I lose every vote that Judy Peters controls, why I shall at least preserve my self respect. I'm going away from here within the hour — as soon as I can see Morris Bryant and hire him to carry a message down the mountain telling my local campaign managers to arrange a series of meetings at which I may address the people. If you want to make these meetings a series of joint debates I'll send word to announce them as such, and we'll divide time."

"I think I'll say yes to that," said Talley, "though personally I rather enjoy the fun of dealing with Judy. She's a character and I'm fond of studying human nature, especially when it presents itself in unusual shapes. Still, what you say is true. This sort of thing is unworthy men who aspire to the Governorship. It's all well enough for candidates for sheriff or constable and all that, but with us it's different. Besides if you go on a speaking tour, I must be with you, or you'll carry all the mountain votes that Judy doesn't control. Her

queenship extends only over this part of the mountains and even here there are a good many voters who are not under her control. In the other mountain counties outside these three, she has no influence of course. Let's arrange a programme for our tour."

"We'd better leave that to the campaign managers, who know the country. I'll write to mine and you to yours, telling them to consult each other and arrange for six or eight meetings up here. Morris Bryant will carry both letters."

"All right. This is Saturday. They won't be able to get out notices for a meeting before Tuesday, and by the way, there's to be a barbecue and tournament on Wednesday over at Rockfish Gap. That'll be our first appointment. Suppose we go down to my house for the intervening days and get ourselves civilized again."

Hargreaves declined the invitation, explaining thus:

"There's a man living, as I learn, about ten miles from here whom I want to see. He and I were schoolmates once — many years ago,

36 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

and when he heard I was coming to the mountains he wrote exacting a promise that I would visit him. This is my best opportunity."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Marcellus McGrath, but we boys at Southall's school always shortened the first name to Mark."

"Oh, I know him. I say, Hargreaves, you'd better spend Sunday with me. Mark is awfully poor, you know, and he has eleven children, and — well, I think you'll fare better and be more comfortable at my house."

"I'm sure I should; but I think I'll go to Mark's. He was very insistent, and I'd not like to hurt his feelings. Of course I can't offer to pay him for my entertainment, but I'll find some way of making my stay a benefit rather than a tax to him in his poverty. Tell me about him. He used to be a moony, dreamy, visionary fellow at school. He read poetry when he should have been studying his lessons, and when he quitted school he had only the rudiments of an education. He must have improved on that since I saw him."

"Why do you think so?"

"Why, he tells me he's a schoolmaster."

"You don't know the mountains, Hargreaves. Up here a man who can read without stopping to spell the large words, write without sticking his tongue out, and cipher to the rule of three, is regarded as a very learned person indeed, and for all practical purposes of mountain school teaching he is so. Nobody in these regions wants more education for his children than such a master can give him — nobody except the few well to do men, such as Mark's father was, and they send their boys off to boarding school."

"Mark's father was well to do then?"

"Yes, for these parts. He was worth ten or twelve thousand dollars when he died."

"What became of it?"

"Long division; he had fifteen children. Besides, he didn't leave any of it to Mark."

"Why not?"

"Why, you see Mark was a disappointment to him in every way. He was the only son in that family of fifteen, and old McGrath was ambitious for him. He sent him away to school, and meant to send him to the Univer-

38 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

sity and then make a lawyer of him. But, as you know, Mark wouldn't take an education in any regular way at least. He read every book he could lay his hands upon, except his school text books. His father was disgusted and took him out of school. He tried to set him at work in a store, and indeed he set him up in a store of his own at the county seat of this county. But the young ne'er-do-weel simply would not bother himself to attend to his business. He would lock the store for days at a time and go off into the woods with three or four books in the bosom of his hunting shirt. Finally — after he had given up the mercantile venture — he married a mountain girl, physically one of the rarest beauties I ever saw, but absolutely illiterate. Even after being the wife of a schoolmaster for all these years, she can neither read nor write. His father completely repudiated him, and ever since that time Mark has lived — or subsisted at least — on a rocky little patch of mountain land belonging to his wife. He 'keeps school,' as they say up here, during the winter, and the rest of the time he does as nearly nothing as a man can do.

Really, Hargreaves, you'd better give up going there and go home with me."

But Hargreaves was determined, and what Talley had told him of McGrath's circumstances confirmed him in his resolution.

"I may be able to do something for the poor fellow or his family," he urged as a final argument in favor of the course on which he was determined.

An hour later the two friendly rivals bade Judy good-bye, and set off, Talley to return to his plantation home, Hargreaves to walk ten or more rocky and precipitous miles to the home of his impoverished ex-schoolfellow.

Judy offered no objection to their departure, as they had feared she might.

"'Tain't no use to waste your breath 'polo-gizin'," she said when they told her of their purpose. "I ain't a goin' to cry my eyes out over bein' shet o' yous." In the mountain dialect the word "you" was regarded as the singular, and "yous" as the plural of the pronoun. "I ain't got no use fer a man what can't hold a bull calf by the ears 'thout lettin'

40 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

him go, an' as fer you other feller, I ain't seed no reason yit to put on mournin' fer your goin' away. When yous gits your speakin' breeches on, I reckon maybe I'll go an' hear you spout. I dunno fer shore. Only I reckon maybe yous has got some new stories to tell in your speeches; any way none on 'em's been wasted on me since here you's been."

With that oblique reflection upon their neglect to entertain her with news or anecdote, she turned away, offering no other farewell.

"We have deeply offended the old girl," said Hargreaves.

"I don't know so well about that," answered Talley, who knew more of the Queen's peculiarities than his friend did. "It doesn't follow as a necessary inference. She has a bitter tongue always, and she is exceedingly mindful of her dignity. She has never been visited by gubernatorial candidates before, and I suspect she has feared to be gracious lest we should conclude that she was awed by our presence. Any how, I got the worst of it, with that confounded bull calf, and if I'm satisfied you ought to be."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 41

"I suppose I ought. At any rate I'll have no more of it."

"Nor will I. Good day. We'll meet at the barbecue, and probably they'll make us act as judges in their sporting contests. If they do, we must take pains to be unanimous, with no dissenting opinions, or they'll mob us. Good-bye. Sorry you're not coming with me for the Sunday."

V

HIS first view of Marcellus McGrath's home convinced Hargreaves that what he had heard of his old school-fellow's poverty was only a part of the story.

The house consisted of two log cabins, built after the mountain fashion with poles instead of nails to hold the roof clapboards in place. The two cabins were set about eighteen feet apart, and the space between was floored with rough puncheons and roofed over in tumble-down fashion. Two of the corners of the hall thus created were rudely partitioned off, making closets for some of the multitudinous family to sleep in. A very small low log cabin, standing twenty-five or thirty feet away in rear of the house constituted the kitchen.

The only substantial-looking thing about the place was the chimney at one end of the house. It was built of stone instead of being con-

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 43

structed in the usual mountain fashion of sticks and mud. McGrath explained this single indulgence a little later by saying :

“ You see, Dick, rocks are about the plentifullest thing there is round here and I had to do something with 'em. So after two stick and mud chimneys had burned down, I hit on the idea of stacking the rocks up into a chimney with mud for mortar. You see the fire bakes the mud into a sort of brick stuff, and so there you are.”

The little mountain farm was as convincing as the house itself in the matter of its master's poverty and habitual unthrift. The small field of corn which was now ripening had obviously received very little cultivation, and was therefore yielding scarcely more than half the grain it should have produced even on that sterile mountain side. The few hogs belonging to the place were constantly committing depredations in the potato and turnip patches, interrupted in their raids now and then by the swarm of McGrath children whose duty it was supposed to be to watch them. There were chickens all round the doors, gaunt, lean, long-legged

44 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

chickens that had evidently been compelled all their lives to rest content with such a living as they could pick up for themselves, eked out now and then by half a loaf of mouldy corn bread, thrown out from house or kitchen as no longer fit to be eaten. Each of the small windows of the house had lost from one to three panes of glass, and the holes thus left were stopped with cast-off garments or whatever else had come handy. The wood pile was scantily supplied with the fallen limbs of trees, and one of the older boys was lazily busy trying to convert these into fire wood, with a very dull axe — dull chiefly because the frame of the grindstone which stood by had been broken some weeks before and nobody had as yet repaired it.

When Hargreaves arrived at the place, McGrath was stretched upon his back on a bench, reading. The entire company of children, with one exception, scurried to points of vantage from which they might gaze at the stranger in the comfortable but mistaken belief that they were themselves unseen.

The one exception was a rather tall girl in



IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 45

short skirts who might have been of any age between fourteen and eighteen, who politely came forward to receive the visitor. As she advanced she impatiently motioned to the rest to retire, and she seemed not a little embarrassed by their failure to obey.

"Good day, sir," she said to Hargreaves. "Pappy, here's a gentleman to see you." For all of half a minute the master of the house made no response either in words or by movement. He wanted to finish the paragraph he was reading before submitting to interruption. When he had done so he slowly rose and advanced to the stranger.

"Don't you know me?" asked Hargreaves.

"Well, if it ain't Dick Hargreaves shore enough! Irene, go and tell your mammy my old friend Hargreaves is here." Then in a half whisper to the girl, which the visitor couldn't help overhearing, he added: "Tell her to fix herself up a bit, and you see to it yourself." Turning back to his friend he continued, "I reckon I never should 'a' known you, Dick, but for your voice. Nobody could ever forget

46 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

that. It always reminds me of Byron's lines:

" 'Her voice was low and sweet,
An excellent thing in woman.' "

But your voice is strong, as well as low and sweet. It *carries*, and you always did enunciate your words so clearly that nobody could mistake 'em no matter how low you spoke. Come in and make yourself at home. I haven't seen you since I left school, and I hate to think how long ago that was."

Hargreaves was quick to observe that while in the main McGrath used correct English, there were frequent traces of the mountain dialect in his speech — traces far more marked than any that had been present during his school days. Presently the reason for this appeared in the form of Mrs. McGrath. Her speech was altogether that of the mountaineers. While McGrath had been unconsciously acquiring habits of dialect speech from association with her, she had obviously acquired nothing of a better kind from him.

Mother of a great brood of children as she was, and utterly negligent of her personal ap-

pearance as she had become, Hargreaves had no difficulty in discovering in her the frayed and faded remains of what must once have been a remarkable physical beauty.

"Howdy," she said when the visitor was presented. "Is you toted yourself on shanks's mares all the way from Judy Peters's to here? Well, I swan ef you ain't a good one, shore enough, an' the day's mighty hot too—a scorcher fer this time o' year, as the feller said."

"I didn't find the heat oppressive," answered Hargreaves. "But I walked in rather leisurely fashion, enjoying the beauty and sublimity of your mountain scenery."

"Well, now that's what yous what comes from way down whar they ain't no mountings is always a sayin'. Fer my part I like to see a patch o' level groun' a layin' about, as the feller says."

It was the habit of many of the mountaineers thus to make of their utterances alleged quotations from some mysterious personage revealed to consciousness only as "the feller."

48 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"I was way down to Hanover County once — maybe you know whar that is — an' I rode down thar on the cars, an' I tell you they was purty. They had plush benches to sit on an' they was picturs painted on the walls an' ceilin's. But what was purtiest of all, 'cordin' to my way o' figgerin' it out, was the great big fields as flat as a pancake. Any how you ain't got here none too soon, fer the sun's a gittin' past the noon mark an' dinner's e'en-a-most ready I 'spect. You see we's quality folks nowadays, sense a ole aunt o' my husban's died when she was ninety year old or thereabouts an' lef' us her ole nigger cook all fer our own. I don't never have to bother 'bout watchin' dinner got ready an' sot on the table. Irene, is the table sot?"

"Yes, mammy," the girl answered from a back porch where the meal was to be served in deference to the temperature.

When a little later the dinner was announced, a company of rather more than half the children rushed like a pack of hungry wolves into the porch and scramblingly seated themselves before the guest or his host and

hostess had come into the place. The rest of the children, as was learned upon inquiry, were too bashful to endure the presence of company, and had betaken themselves to the kitchen to dine off corn pone crumbled into pot-liquor, a greasy dainty which the young savages looked upon with special favor and devoured with insatiable appetites.

Hargreaves observed a flush of shame on the face of the girl Irene, as she sought in vain to curb the savagery of her brothers — for she had no sisters. He observed some other things also. She spoke with comparatively little of the dialect in her utterance, and on one occasion, after she had several times used a mountain form of speech, he was himself at pains to use the correct form. A few minutes later, though not so soon as to invite attention, the girl again used the phrase, but correctly that time.

“That girl is worth observing,” Hargreaves reflected. “Obviously she is trying to improve her English, and her manners too I should say judging by results, by closely observing and imitating better bred people. By the way

50 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

she's distinctly pretty, and her voice is singularly musical. I must cultivate her acquaintance while I'm here. She's a riddle as she bears herself in such surroundings as hers are."

VI

COLONEL HARGREAVES found it by no means easy to become acquainted with Irene. She was perhaps constitutionally shy, but a fact of greater influence was that she was almost morbidly conscious of her own deficiencies of education, manner and speech, distressingly aware of what she regarded as her inferiority. And Colonel Hargreaves's own bearing served to increase the difficulty of approach to her. Accustomed all his life to a commanding social position, his manner was one of such entire self possession under all circumstances that he seemed to the little mountain maid a being from some other sphere, kindly, benevolent, but utterly unapproachable.

Accordingly the girl shyly kept out of his way as much as she could, and when he did get speech with her, she was apt suddenly to

52 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

discover some imperative reason for running away as soon as possible.

Fortunately her shyness did not take the form of moody silence. When Hargreaves asked her a question or made a remark to her, she replied with a certain instinctive courtesy that was strong enough to override bashfulness.

Her answers interested Colonel Hargreaves mightily, and the glimpses he got of her intellectual state intensified his determination to learn more of her. Sometimes those answers of hers reflected the profound and credulous ignorance of the people among whom she had been bred; sometimes they suggested an amazing perception of truth and even a degree of information that surprised the elderly student of her psychological state.

By the time that the dinner of fried chicken and "new corn" bread was served on the following Sunday, Hargreaves had reached several definite conclusions regarding her as follows:

1. She is a girl of unusually good natural intellect;

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 53

2. She has received no regular education, and not much even of an irregular sort, but;

3. She has read more than most girls of her age, and her reading has been of a kind that girls generally know nothing about;

4. She has profited by her reading, though in some cases it has misled her, and in other cases it has been rendered well-nigh meaningless to her by her lack of technical instruction:

5. She has the instincts of a gentlewoman very strongly developed — an inheritance probably through Mark from his mother, who was a Venable; her deficiency in the manners and bearing of a gentlewoman is due solely to her life long lack of example; she is alertly imitative, so that this defect would be quickly cured if she could be placed in refined and cultivated surroundings, and every trace of dialect would disappear with it.

The kindly gentleman seized upon the opportunity that dinner afforded, to force himself as it were upon the girl's attention, by asking her to accompany him on a tramp up the steep side of the mountain to its top, a point from

54 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

which she had told him there was view of extraordinary breadth and beauty, extending so far to the south as to include the peaks of Otter, and sweeping to an equally distant horizon in every direction.

He did not know, because he could not imagine, how sorely the girl dreaded the ordeal of so long an association with one whose culture and learning and knowledge of the great outer world fairly appalled her. But he was a tactful man, and he understood her shyness sufficiently to deal wisely with it, and after the ascent of the mountain was begun, he adroitly managed to divert her attention from such things as might awaken her bashful self consciousness and fix it upon external matters. Especially he was at pains to suppress every manifestation of his own superiority and to emphasize every thing in which she excelled. After she had leaped like some wild animal over rocks and chasms and crags that severely taxed his unaccustomed legs, and as she stood at ease upon a giddy height that set his head whirling, he said to her:

“How I envy you, Irene!”

"Envy me? You? Why — oh, I reckon you're a jokin'."

"Oh, no, I'm not joking. I envy you your youth, and your superb health, and your nimbleness. You see I'm on the wrong side of fifty, and besides I never had a life in the mountains to enjoy as you do."

"Now you must be joking," she answered, and he observed that this time she did not drop the "g" from the end of the word. "How quick she is to detect differences and correct her faults," he mused, as she continued:

"You're a great, educated man, and I'm an ignorant mountain girl — just 'poor white trash,' as they say."

She paused a moment and then with a sigh added:

"And the worst of it is I can never be anything else. I must just stand it, I reckon, and never know no more 'n' I do now. They ain't any way to learn. I'll grow up the way I've been raised, and I reckon some day I'll have to marry some man that can't more'n read an' write, an' maybe not even that. I reckon it was a mistake."

56 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"You reckon what was a mistake, Irene?"

"Why, for me to try to learn anything an' be anything more'n other folks up here is — I mean are."

"Tell me all about that, Irene. I see clearly enough that you have tried to improve yourself and it seems to me you've done very well, considering the circumstances."

"You mean Pappy and Mammy an' the children? They're my circumstances, or part of 'em at least. No, they ain't — aren't, I mean, and that's just it. You see I've learnt just enough to spoil things."

"Go on and tell me what you mean, Irene. I am deeply interested. How do you mean that you've learned just enough to spoil things?"

"Why, it's this a way — this way I ought to say. I reckon Pappy didn't get a very good education when he was a boy, but he got enough to be a schoolmaster here in the mountains where folks are so ignorant. When I was a tiny bit of a girl I thought he was wonderful in that way and I made up my mind to have him teach me all he knew. He did that,

but it wasn't much. I read all the books he borrowed too, and I learned something out of them, though I couldn't understand some of 'em. That's because I wasn't educated I reckon. Anyhow I found that folks in the books didn't talk the same way as folks in the mountains did, and one day I read a book about the mountains, and I found the man that wrote it was sort o' makin' fun of the way we talk. So I thought I'd learn to talk the other way — the way you all do. I noticed the differences in the books I read, and when I found out the proper way to say a thing I had been saying wrong I tried to get into the habit of saying it that way. It was just the same with people. When I heard any educated person talk I listened and tried to learn to talk the same way."

"That was admirable," said Hargreaves, "and I must say you have done wonders in educating yourself."

"May be so, leastways, considering. But I wish I hadn't done it."

"But why, Irene? Surely —"

"Well, first off, I couldn't really learn to

58 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

talk properly. How could I when everybody around me talked the other way all the time? Everybody but Pappy, and even he talks that way more and more as he gets older."

"But surely, Irene, it is better to speak as you do, with only a little of the dialect in your speech, than to use the dialect all the time."

"Sometimes I think it ain't — isn't, I mean. You see I can't speak with people like you without their seeing at once that I'm an ignorant mountaineer and laughing at me, and when the folks up here hear me talk they just think I'm stuck up, an' so they laugh at me too — and some of 'em even hate me for it. At first, and for a long time, — yes, till about a year ago, — I was glad and proud of it all. Then I — well, anyhow, I'm mighty sorry now I ever did it."

"What happened to change your view of the matter?"

"Nothing. Leastways — no, how do you say that?"

"I usually say, 'at least' or 'at any rate' or something like that."

"Oh, yes. Well, I was going to say noth-

ing very particular happened to make me change my way of thinking. It was only that little by little I found out how other folks thought about it and how stuck up they thought I was. They don't any of 'em like me, and they laugh at me behind my back and sometimes even to my face. You see, Colonel Hargreaves, I thought at first I could learn all of it, and get to talking—speaking, you call it—like educated people. That would have been worth while, but I couldn't do that; I reckon nobody could, under the circumstances. So I've just spoiled myself for a mountain girl without making myself anything better. But we must go on up if we are to see the view from the top in the best light. Are you rested now? 'Tain't far to the top from here."

The journey was resumed, and within a brief while Irene sprang and her companion painfully climbed up a little cliff and over a mass of broken rock which constituted the last defences of the summit solitude.

The view was entrancing and Col. Hargreaves rejoiced for a time in silence. Then

60 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

turning to the girl, whose face was rapturous in expression while her loosened hair, caught by the wind, streamed out like a pennant, he asked:

“Do the mountain people often come up here?”

“Never. They think they have enough climbing to do without hunting for it. I reckon I’m the only one that ever cares to come.”

“And you? How often do you come?”

“Oh, whenever I get time. It’s my only real pleasure. When the weather is fine, like it is to-day, I often stay up here all day long.”

“Of course in bad weather —” Colonel Hargreaves began. The girl interrupted:

“I don’t think there is any such thing as bad weather. It’s all good if you know how to take it. I’ve been up here when it was raining hard and I’ve watched the water trickling down the sides of the mountain, one little stream running into another till, as they got a little way down, they formed roaring torrents. Then there is always a mist up here when it rains, and I like to watch that make

things look different from what they are, some bigger, some smaller, and all out of their proper shapes. Sometimes there's a beautiful white mist when it isn't raining. I've seen it slide down the mountain a little way, and leave the sun shining on top. It's fine when that happens. You can't see any world any more than if there wasn't anything anywhere except up here. You're looking down on the tops of the clouds, and they're as white as snow and cover up every thing out of sight. Once when I was looking down on 'em that way they began thundering and lightning on the world below, while up here it was all bright and beautiful."

"But how about the winter time, Irene? You can't come up here then."

"Oh, yes, sir, I do, and that's the best time of all. The whole world is white, just as if it had been washed and bleached. The mountains look like great folds in a snow white cloth. The rocks everywhere get themselves covered with ice that sparkles and glitters in the sun. Oh, it's grand then, but I can't tell you about it. I don't know the right words

62 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

even to think about it in. I just have to feel it and let the feeling soak in. It's like the finest poetry you ever read, only so much more so that you forget every thing else and just sit and think. No, I reckon you don't think exactly, leastways I don't, for when you think you sort o' word out your thoughts in your mind, and there ain't any words for that. I reckon you just sort o' *live* it, and *be* it, or part of it."

"Did anybody ever tell you you are a poet, Irene?"

"A poet? No, sir. 'Twould be foolish to say that. I never made a rhyme in my life."

"Some of the truest poets in the world, Irene, never make rhymes. Like you they feel the utter inadequacy of words to express their poetical thoughts. Did you ever read Ruskin?"

"No — except a scrap I found in an old newspaper. But I liked that. In it he said:

"'The gathering orange stain on yonder western peak, reflects the sunsets of a thousand years.'

"You see, Colonel Hargreaves, I had often

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 63

felt something like that, an' I didn't know how to say it. I reckon that's what made me like what Ruskin said. Who was he? Where did he live, and how long ago? I always like to know that sort o' thing about the people that wrote the books for us."

"Quite right," answered the Colonel. "Biography helps us to understand and appreciate the nobler utterances of men. Ruskin is still living. Indeed he is a comparatively young man. He's a professor at Oxford University in England."

"Does he write poetry? Verses?"

"Verses, no. Poetry, yes — poetry of the noblest kind. Listen, Irene. I mean to send you a little parcel of books when I get back home, and among them will be a set of Ruskin's works."

The girl clapped her hands and shouted, "Goody, goody, goody!" as any little child might, and if she tendered no more formal thanks, Hargreaves did not observe the omission. He was thinking, planning, wondering. Presently he said:

"The sky is as clear as crystal, Irene. How

64 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

I should like to stay up here on the mountain top and see the sun set."

"Why not do it then?" she asked in wonder.

"Why, it is a long way to your father's house and a very rough way. If we were to stay till sunset, darkness might come on before we got home, and so we might lose our way."

"Lose our way? Me? Why, I've stayed up here till midnight many a time. I could go down to our house the darkest night you ever saw."

"But won't they be uneasy at the house, if we're late getting back?"

"Uneasy? No, indeed. They ain't never uneasy — I mean they never bother about me. If I didn't get home till morning, they wouldn't notice. I reckon it's because there's so many of us. If they was uneasy every time one of us turned up missing, I reckon they'd 'a' worried the lives out of 'em before this."

So the pair stayed on the mountain top till the glow of the sun, as it sank behind the range to the west, faded out of their gladdened countenances.

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 65

As they clambered down the hill, Irene showing the way and choosing the easiest descents for her companion, Hargreaves said to himself:

“I’m thoroughly well acquainted with the little mountain maid now. We’ll see what can be done for her.” But to the girl herself, he said nothing.

VII

THE two men, schoolfellows once but widely differing now in character, position and everything else, sat together in the tumble down porch that night long after the other inmates of the house were asleep. There was a moon, and as the house fronted to the south, the porch was flooded with its light, tempting men of imaginative minds to keep vigil. Both were smokers too, and Hargreaves had brought a supply of really good tobacco with him, or rather, Morris Bryant had brought it in the luggage Hargreaves had left at the railroad station during his visit to Judy Peters. He had commissioned Morris to bring his valise up to McGrath's house, and to bring a stout, sure footed mule for use as a saddle animal during the speaking tour in the mountains, where the less sure footing

of a horse was dangerous both to man and beast.

As they smoked the two talked, and Hargreaves was at pains to direct the conversation into the channels he desired it to follow.

He questioned McGrath about his life and got the story of an idle, purposeless, ambitionless existence, in which reading had been rather a dissipation than a helpful exercise — a narcotic drug rather than a healthful food to the mind. For this man of strangely compounded character read always without purpose and without profit. He read everything he could get to read, from quack medicine almanacs to the odd volumes of an out of date cyclopædia which he had bought for a trifle at an auction sale. Having a singularly retentive memory, especially for inconsequent details, his mind was a crowded lumber room of utterly unrelated facts. As he had no gift of generalizing, McGrath made no use whatever of his varied information. He never put two facts together for the sake of giving birth to an inference. He cared nothing for the significance of a fact, but he cherished the fact as a child or an imbe-

68 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

cile cherishes old door knobs, bits of broken porcelain, and other odds and ends for which he has no use but in the mere possession of which he finds an unaccountable pleasure.

Hargreaves asked him about his plans for his children, and found he had none. He lived in the passing hour. He knew no to-morrow and cared for no yesterday. If he could lie on his back and read whatever he could find to read, he was content. The small exertion he put forth in teaching school was in his eyes a sacrifice to his need of three meals a day. The slender cultivation he gave to his small crops seemed to him the task of a galley slave, imposed by the cruel decree of necessity in a badly ordered world where food refused to produce itself spontaneously and clothing had not the habit of growing on trees. He was in short, a typical specimen of what the negroes in Virginia contemptuously called "poor white trash." Irene had fully realized that fact as Hargreaves had discovered on the mountain top, and its bitterness was the calamity of her young life.

The generous old Virginian had made up his

mind up there on the summit to rescue the girl from the fate that threatened her, and as he sat there in the moonlit porch that night, questioning her improvident father, he began to see his way clear to his purpose. He knew how obstinately the very poor generally cling to the children for whom they can provide neither comfort in the present nor hopeful conditions for the future, and he had expected at first to encounter that kind of ill considered obstinacy on McGrath's part. But their conversation had not long continued before a clearer understanding of the man he had to deal with relieved him of that apprehension. He felt little hesitation in going straight to his purpose.

"What are you going to do about Irene's education, Mark?" he asked, adding:

"She seems to me an unusually bright girl, and she has been educated either too much or too little — too much to be happy or contented in the life that seems to lie before her, and far too little to enable her to seek life of another kind."

"Yes, I know," answered the father indif-

70 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ferently. "She's always grumbling about it, but as I can't help it, I don't listen when she complains."

"But you ought to listen, Mark. Her complaint, if she makes one, is perfectly just. Her outlook in life is simply intolerable to a girl of her intellect and temperament, and it is you who have made it so."

"Me? Why, how? I'm sure I've taught her all I know."

"Yes, and that is precisely what you ought not to have done if you did not intend to have some one else teach her greatly more."

"I suppose you're right, Dick, but for the life of me I can't see it. It isn't my fault that I'm too poor to send her away to school."

"There I differ with you. I think it is your fault and nobody's else, but we needn't discuss that. It would do no good. It is too late to remedy that, but it isn't too late to save Irene from a life of discontent and unhappiness."

"But how can I do that? I tell you I haven't any money."

"No money is needed. Only a little common sense on your part is necessary. Let me

take the girl home with me, and have her educated with my own daughters. It won't cost you a cent, or me either. You know I don't believe in sending girls off to boarding schools. I'm having mine educated at home. They have a very capable governess, and we employ tutors to come to the house for subjects beyond the range of a governess. If you'll let me take Irene, she shall have a full share in the advantages my girls enjoy, and in a few years she'll be a cultivated woman fit to shine in any society. You'll have reason to be proud of her."

"Yes — and how proud she will be of her father, the mountain schoolmaster who can't cipher beyond the rule of three, and of her mother, who can't read, and her ignorant, ill-bred brothers! She'll be ashamed even to remember our names."

"Listen to me, Mark. You totally misjudge Irene. You really don't know her. You've mooned so much over your mostly useless reading that you've never become acquainted with your daughter. I know her better than you do at this moment, though I never saw her

72 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

until yesterday. But suppose all you suggest by your irony is true. It is your own fault, as you very well know. You had every opportunity and you threw your chance away. You made your own bed and you must lie in it, but if it is a bed of thorns to Irene, you have no right to make her lie in it. You have no right to condemn her to a life of wretchedness merely by way of shielding yourself against her possible consciousness of superiority. The superiority exists already, for she thinks, and you merely drug yourself with other men's utterances. She feels keenly, as you do not. Give her a chance to complete a development that has already gone too far if it is not to go farther."

McGrath sat smoking in silence for some time. At last he said:

"I reckon you're right, Dick, and of course it's mighty kind of you. But naturally it 'gravels' a man to think of his own daughter becoming so fine an' stuck up as to be ashamed of him. However, she's that a'ready, an' even if she stays here it'll get worse an' worse as she grows older. I reckon you can take her,

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 73

Dick. It'll be best for her and none the worse for the rest of us."

"Thank you, Mark, for Irene's sake. I'll talk with her in the morning, and if she consents I'll telegraph for my wife to meet her in Lynchburg and fit her out with clothes before taking her home. Good night. I'm going to bed now. You've done the best and wisest thing you ever did in your life, Mark, in deciding to let me take her."

"Reckon it'll cost you a lot to rig her out in new finery, Dick."

"There'll be no finery about it. As a girl under care of a governess she will dress very simply, as my own girls do. Besides, I can afford the expense. Good night. Please say nothing to Irene till I have had my talk with her."

"I won't. Good night."

VIII

COLONEL HARGREAVES was out of bed at the very earliest dawn of the next morning, several hours earlier than he was accustomed to wake. He knew that Irene was an early riser, and with his habitual impatience to execute a purpose once formed, he was determined to have his interview with the girl as soon as possible.

In the gray dawn he found her in the little garden searching for still surviving tomatoes to serve for his breakfast. Joining her he proposed a hurried trip to the mountain top, upon the plea that he wanted to see the sun rise.

"Will you mind going?" he asked with some anxiety.

"Oh, no," she answered with childlike simplicity, "I'd go anywhere you wanted me to. But we must hurry or the sun'll beat us."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 75

They climbed hurriedly and succeeded in anticipating the sunrise.

The girl had seen the sun rise from that peak many scores of times, but the inspiration of it all was still as fresh as ever. Indeed the scene seemed to stir the half developed poetic side of her nature on this occasion to a keener apprehension of the grandeur of it than she had ever known before. The companionship of this man of culture, refinement and education — a man who seemed to her to embody in himself all her higher conceptions, — had much to do with her state of mind. Perhaps the half sleepless night she had passed in recalling all that he had said to her on the previous day, and indulging in dreams of opportunity which she could not hope to realize in this life, but which she vaguely hoped a future existence might bring to her, had keyed up her nerves to a readier sensitiveness than usual. Whatever the cause, Hargreaves saw clearly that her state narrowly bordered on the ecstatic, and, contrary to his original purpose, he forbore for a time to open the conversation he had taken her up there to hold.

76 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

When at last she seemed to have drunk her soul full of the intoxicating beauty, and she began to talk about that which before she had only been able to feel, Hargreaves said:

"I wonder if you meant what you said this morning, Irene."

"What was it? I don't remember, but if I said it *to you* I meant it."

"Why, you said you would go anywhere I might wish you to go."

"Oh, yes, of course." Then after a pause — "I meant that."

To his astonishment the girl burst into tears, for which no possible reason was apparent.

He did not annoy her with remonstrances or efforts to check the outburst. He had lived too long in the world and especially he had too closely observed feminine human nature to make that mistake. He simply sat still on a great rock ledge and waited for her to recover her composure. She in her turn felt keenly the necessity of offering him some explanation of her mood, and when she grew quite calm again she tried to do so.

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 77

“Oh, Colonel Hargreaves,” she began, “you don’t know how terrible it all is. My mother is getting to hate me, and I can’t help it. She calls me a ‘stuck up piece o’ goods,’ an’ says I’ll never come to be of any account. She’s said that sort o’ thing many an’ many’s the time, till it’s got so I try my best to talk dialect when I’m where she is, just so as not to rile her. But last night something terrible must have happened. She went to bed at nine o’clock like she always does, and she must have been asleep for two hours or more before you and Pappy got through talking in the porch. I reckon Pappy must have told her something or other when he went to bed, for she got up and came and waked me. She was mighty mad about something, but she wouldn’t tell me what. She called me an ungrateful — oh, I can’t tell you all the hard things she said, only that the substance of it was that I was so ‘stuck up’ that even the mother who bore me wasn’t good enough for me to associate with. Oh, Colonel Hargreaves, I wish I had never tried to learn things.”

“There you are wrong. You have done

78 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

your best to improve yourself and your condition. That is the duty of every human being. It is only in that way that the world grows wiser and better."

"But she told me she wanted me to pack up my duds an' get out of here, and when I asked her where I could go, she said she didn't care, but she reckoned I'd go to some o' my fine, stuck up friends. It hurts me more than you can think, Colonel, to have my mother feel that way towards me. That is why I wish I had never even learned how to read. May be she would have loved me then."

"Listen, Irene," the Colonel said in a calm, soothing voice. "You are wrong to wish yourself more ignorant than you are, and besides, such wishing is useless. You can't undo what is done, but you can go on improving upon it, and that is your duty now. It would be wrong for me to criticize your mother to you, and indeed I don't wish to do anything of the kind. But I may explain to you that her conceptions are far more at fault than she is. She feels her own deficiency in certain respects, and it is natural that she should be

a bit jealous when she sees her daughter becoming her superior in those respects. You must be patient and forgiving with her, and you'll live to see her proud of you. I think I know what it was that angered her last night. Your father probably told her of a plan he and I agreed upon for your education. It was to tell you of that that I asked you to come up here with me this morning."

Then he explained to her how his own daughters were being educated at home, and how he wanted her to go to his house and share their advantages with them.

"That is what I had in mind," he added, "when I asked if you really meant it when you said you would go anywhere I wished."

The girl seemed for a time unable either to understand or to believe what she heard. Here was an offer — all unexpected, un hoped for, incredible it seemed to her — of an opportunity to realize even the most extravagant of her dreams. Education, refinement of life, association with people of culture — everything she had vaguely desired — were hers for the taking. It seemed so wonderful, so incredible

80 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

that she sat for a time half dazed, before she could realize the actuality of it.

Then a sudden apprehension seized upon her.

"But I'm not fit," she said. "Your daughters would be ashamed of me and laugh at me."

"You forget, Irene, that my daughters are well bred girls, taught from infancy to regard the feelings of others with tenderness. That is the very foundation of all things among people brought up as my daughters have been. They will not think of laughing at you or pitying you or doing anything else that might hurt your feelings. You will soon learn to love them and they to love you. You are quick to observe and to profit by observation. You will soon fall into their ways, so that there will be nothing in your manners or your speech to make you seem or feel strange or out of place."

"But won't it be selfish in me to leave Pappy and Mammy?"

"Not at all. It will give them one less mouth to feed, and under the circumstances

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 81

that will be a great relief to them. Your father sees how great an advantage this will be to you, and he willingly consents. Your mother will consent too, when I explain the case to her. I am waiting now for your own consent."

"Let me think it out," she said, in a voice choked with emotion.

"Yes, that is best. Think it out, and I will not interrupt. When you have made up your mind you can tell me."

With that he rose and walked away toward the other side of the rocky open space which formed the bald spot on the mountain's head. There was enough of grandeur and beauty in whatever direction he looked to satisfy the utmost demands of his nature.

Half an hour passed, and still the girl sat there on the rocks heeding nothing, saying nothing, and looking nowhere except out into space. Finally, when nearly an hour had passed, she rose suddenly, walked quickly to the place where Hargreaves stood, touched his elbow, and as he turned to face her, said:

"I will go with you. It is right. I have thought it out."

82 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Saying no further word she turned and began the descent, he following her in silence.

That the girl was feeling deeply, he clearly saw. What she was feeling he could not know.

IX

IT was about four o'clock, in the afternoon, and the family at Redrock, Colonel Hargreaves's plantation, had just sat down to dinner when the plantation post boy arrived from the little railroad station, bearing the family mail bag.

"Why, Mrs. Hargreaves," said Miss Ann Pollack, the governess, "here's a telegraphic despatch for you." It was at the time when, as Owen Meredith declares, "the word telegram set grammarians frantic," and Miss Pollack was far too scrupulous in speech to use a word whose place in good verbal society was as yet doubtful. So she called the missive a "telegraphic despatch."

"A telegraphic despatch?" cried Aunt Susan. "Oh, Mary, don't open it, pray don't!"

Aunt Susan was the elderly "unattached

84 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

female" of Redrock. There was one such in nearly every plantation house — a distant relative usually, unmarried and possessed of some small means of her own, but living as an honored and loved member of the plantation family.

"But why not, Aunt Susan? I must open and read it."

"For heaven's sake don't! It means somebody is dead; a telegraphic despatch *always* means that, you know. I never received but one in my life, and I just knew it meant that somebody was dead, so I kept it for three days unopened, and then somebody else did it for me. You see I knew what it must mean."

"Whose death did it announce, Aunt Susan?" asked Helen, one of the daughters of the house.

"Why, that's the strangest part of the story. It didn't say anything about the death. It told me my sister Jennie had a new baby, and asked me to come and see my namesake."

"Perhaps this despatch is equally innocent," said Mrs. Hargreaves, smiling. "At any rate I must open and read it."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 85

As she read the lines her face wore a puzzled look. She was unused to telegraphic brevity of diction and at first found it difficult to understand the message. Presently she read it aloud :

“ ‘ Meet me Norvell House, Lynchburg, Wednesday. Bring two seamstresses.

“ ‘ RICHARD HARGREAVES.’ ”

“ What on earth does it mean ? ” asked Aunt Susan.

“ It seems to mean that I am to meet Colonel Hargreaves at the Norvell House — that’s a hotel I suppose — on Wednesday, and that I am to take two seamstresses with me. But what on earth he wants the seamstresses for I can’t imagine.”

“ I reckon he has torn his coat or his trousers up there in the mountains,” ventured Aunt Susan. “ But it wouldn’t take two seamstresses to mend him up. No, that can’t be the explanation. I tell you it means that somebody’s dead. Telegraphic despatches *always* mean that. Wonder who it can be, poor thing.”

86 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Ann, "he means, not that you should take two seamstresses with you, but that he is bringing two. You see the verb has no nominative, but it may not be in the imperative mood."

At that moment Helen, who had quitted the room as soon as the telegram was read, returned, saying:

"Mother, this is Tuesday. If you are to meet Father in Lynchburg to-morrow, you must drive to Richmond this evening." In Virginia the word "evening" always meant afternoon. "I've sent for the carriage to be at the door when dinner's done; I've told your maid to pack a trunk for you, and I've directed Sally and Lucinda to be ready to accompany you. They're the best-looking of your sewing women, and the pleasantest to have along."

"But what do you think your father means, Helen?" asked Aunt Susan, who held Helen's good sense in high esteem and habitually looked to her for the resolution of all doubts.

"I suppose he means what he says; he usu-

ally does. He wants mother to meet him at Lynchburg to-morrow and to have two of the seamstresses with her."

"But why, Helen? Why should he want anything of that kind?"

"I never question my father's acts or words to find a reason for them," answered the girl with all the dignity that pride of race and personal self respect had cultivated in her from infancy. "It would be unbecoming in a girl like me. Besides, I hold to the doctrine that when the head of the family makes a request, it is for his womankind to do his will."

"Oh, of course," answered Aunt Susan, abashed. "I didn't mean to question Richard's right to obedience in his own family. And I'm sure I have never been guilty of the vulgarity of indulging idle curiosity; but I'd give anything to know what all this means."

Helen's smile betrayed her amusement with this speech, and Aunt Susan was quick to defend herself.

"You needn't smile, Helen," she made haste to say. "It's only that a telegraphic despatch

88 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

always means that somebody is dead, and it is only proper sympathy on my part to want to know who it is in this case."

Helen said nothing in reply. It was useless to argue with the gentle old lady, and "quite absurd," Helen thought, "to try to disabuse her mind of a fixed idea."

Making no attempt to accomplish that impossibility, the girl busied herself more profitably in arranging for her mother's journey, and encouraging her to believe it a little less formidable than the elder woman was disposed to think it.

For Mrs. Hargreaves had done very little travelling in her life, and absolutely none of it without an escort. Especially she was unused to travelling by rail. Railroads were few in those early days, and their use was attended by many discomforts. Moreover, the more conservative of the old Virginians were disposed to doubt the propriety or even the respectability of railroad travel, especially for women. Mrs. Hargreaves had made one grand tour by rail to New York, Boston and the Canadian cities, accompanied by her hus-

band and attended by a retinue of colored servants, but with that exception she had gone about only in her carriage. Every summer for years past her carriage had borne her from her home, a few miles out of Richmond, to the White Sulphur or the Rockbridge Alum Springs, journeys that occupied many days in the making, so that the distance between Richmond and Lynchburg was greatly exaggerated in her apprehension.

The thought of going all that way in a railroad car, without an escort, fairly threw her into panic, and when Helen, who was more modern and practical, tried to reassure her she succeeded only in making matters worse. For her explanation revealed the appalling fact that at Burkeville Junction Mrs. Hargreaves must leave her train and take another on a different line.

"How can I ever do that?" the mother asked in real distress of mind. "I tell you, Helen, I simply can't do it. If I try, as of course I must, you'll never see me again. I'm certain to get mixed up and get on board a wrong train and go to some outlandish place

90 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

that nobody ever heard of till the railroad people found it."

"Listen, mother!" said the girl with a gentle authority that was natural with her and that those about her were accustomed to yield to, "your fears are quite groundless, I am sure. Father would never have asked you to take this trip if he had not known you could do it without danger or any serious difficulty. But the thing distresses you, and I won't have that, so I will go with you. I'm not easily lost, and I'll find your way for you."

"But, Helen dear," interrupted Aunt Susan, "it will be a shock to you when you find out who it is that is dead, and perhaps the case is a peculiarly painful one."

Helen felt that it would be useless to reply that there was no death involved in the case, and fortunately her problem was completely solved for her by the arrival at that moment of Tom Hardaway, her "cousin" with three or four "removes" in the relationship. He rode at a furious pace and his horse was foam-flecked and panting as he dismounted.

"I told you so," said Aunt Susan. "He's

come to tell us who's dead! Oh, Mary, how I wish you hadn't opened that telegraphic despatch! I knew it meant a death."

"Am I too late, Helen?" the young man asked eagerly. "Has Cousin Mary gone?"

Helen calmly reassured him and asked why he had ridden so furiously.

"Why, you see I was out after the partridges when Cousin Richard's despatch came, and when I got back to the house that stupid fellow Henry, who had received it in my absence, couldn't be sure whether it had come early in the morning or only a half hour before I got there. He hasn't the remotest conception of time, and he's asleep for the most part. I was afraid of being late. But tell me, when does your mother start? Is there time for you to give me a bite to eat? I went out shooting at sunrise, and except the cup of coffee I took then I've not had a morsel to-day."

Helen smilingly granted him ample time for his dinner, and led him to the table, where the rest had yet to finish their meal.

"Now tell us, Tom," she said when his

92 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

soup gave place to more substantial things, "tell us all about it."

"The trouble is I don't know all about it, or anything about it," answered the young man, with a look of bewilderment, half real and half assumed, on his countenance. "I thought I'd find out here."

"You spoke of a despatch," said the girl. "What was it?"

"Why, it was from Cousin Richard — oh, here it is, read it for yourself while I appease the pangs of hunger."

The young woman read:

"'Mary leaving immediately for Lynchburg by rail. Please escort her.'"

"There, Mother!" she exclaimed, "I knew Father would never ask you to do anything involving annoyance to you. You see when he telegraphed to you he sent this despatch to Tom, in that way removing all the difficulties. That's always Father's way."

"But why didn't he tell me so in his despatch to me?" asked the mother.

"They charge by the word in telegraphing," answered the girl, "and it's expensive. Be-

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 93

sides he probably thought we'd trust him to arrange everything for us. I for one am sorry we doubted his thoughtfulness. It's a shame to all of us."

"But, Helen," broke in Aunt Susan, "in cases of sudden death like this people can't be expected to be calm and think of things the way you do."

X

AMONG the high-bred women of Virginia in that old time, there was a sentiment of loyalty such as is rarely seen anywhere else, a willing submission to male relatives, which the "new woman" of our day would regard as slavish and unworthy.

In fact it was in no sense slavish or unworthy. The women of the Old Dominion were as high-spirited as their fathers, husbands and brothers were, and as ready to assert themselves in case of trespass upon their rights or their dignity. But they were always under the tender and chivalrous care of their male relatives, every man of whom stood ready to defend them at risk or cost of life in case of need. Those male relatives were responsible, even with their lives, for the words and acts of their womankind. And finally they gave to their

wives, mothers, sisters and daughters a deference that is now rarely to be found. Their regard for women was almost an adoration, and in their protection and gentle governance women found not only perfect liberty but extravagant privilege. Whatever a highly bred Virginia woman did or said, every male relative she had was ready to maintain as right. In the eyes of Virginia men, those women were anointed queens who could do no wrong.

In return those women gave to their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons a loyalty that made their opinions indisputable, and their lightest words law. Nothing in restraint of perfect liberty was imposed upon them by the masculine will, but they imposed upon themselves and upon each other a rigid rule of loyal obedience, the smallest infraction of which would have cost the offender the approval of her nearest female friends.

This was the feminine code of honor, and it was as rigidly enforced by women as was the rule of courage and truthfulness among men.

Accordingly, when Colonel Hargreaves told

96 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

his wife what he planned to do for Irene McGrath, that high-bred dame made neither objection nor comment. Her attitude was one of willing and eager obedience to the man she had crowned king of her life. He had decided to take the girl and educate her. Of course he knew what was best, and there was an end of the matter. It was for his wife to carry out his plans and fulfil his purposes.

It is perhaps not easy, in this later time of co-education and professional activity among women, for the reader to understand and realize the ideas and the points of view of the women of Virginia at the middle of the last century. Yet without some measure of such understanding it is impossible to avoid a grievous misconception of those women's characters and impulses.

Irene made a favorable impression upon Mrs. Hargreaves from the beginning.

"The girl is so pretty," said that lady to her husband, "in spite of her outlandish dress, that one cannot help liking her. And she is so modest and so absolutely honest that I have the highest hopes for her. When I get her

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 97

into proper clothes, and she gets over being afraid of me, you'll scarcely know her."

As for Irene, it would be impossible to fathom her complex emotions at this time. Joy and grief, gratitude and regret, ambition and fear, an almost morbid consciousness of her own deficiencies, and a proud sense of something intrinsically worthy in herself, all these and other conflicting emotions were present with her during every waking hour, and still more troublesomely present in her dreams.

Back of all lay her resolute determination to make herself worthy of the good fortune that had so unexpectedly befallen her. In this determination she was strengthened by one comforting thought which came to her in every moment of depression and discouragement.

"There must be something worth while in me," was her thought, "or Colonel Hargreaves would not have undertaken what he is doing for me. Nobody asked him to do it, nobody even suggested it. It isn't as if I had been his niece, or something of that kind.

98 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

He wasn't under any sort of obligation to me. It must be that he thought me worth while in some way, and a great man like him doesn't make mistakes in such things, I reckon."

Irene was almost appalled at first by Mrs. Hargreaves's refinement and culture, as these appeared in her voice, her diction, her gentleness of manner and her attitude of mind, so different from anything the girl had ever known.

But after a little these things ceased to appal her and resolved themselves into an encouragement instead.

"Just to think! I can make myself a woman like that," she reflected, with a thrill of hope and joy in every fibre of her being.

Her determination to accomplish that supreme ambition called into alert activity all her quickness of observation and imitation — in the better sense of that word. She diligently studied Mrs. Hargreaves's speech as a model and conformed her own to it with a rapidity that astonished the older lady.

She had never seen either a table napkin


or a four-pronged fork, but when she first sat at table with her mentor, she quietly waited until she saw what use Mrs. Hargreaves made of those table conveniences, and calmly proceeded to use her own in the same way — a trifle awkwardly at first, but with a rapidly increasing dexterity.

Mrs. Hargreaves observed all these things closely, but without seeming to observe them at all. To her husband, who was off on his speaking tour, she wrote :

“ Your protégée — no, I should say *our* protégée, for I am as much interested in Irene as you are — is doing wonders of self improvement. I am keeping her here in Lynchburg longer than we intended, because she is so quick to learn that I hope there will be very little of the mountain maid left in her by the time we go back to Redrock. I am anxious to spare her all the humiliation I can, and at her present rate of progress she will be very presentable soon. She wears her clothes without awkwardness now ; her voice, as you know, is naturally low and well modulated, and she is rapidly shaking off the dialect. About that

I must tell you something that reveals a good point in her character. As soon as I got her into one presentable gown, I began taking her with me shopping, partly because I thought it might save her from loneliness, and partly because it seemed to me right that her own taste should be consulted in the selection of her clothes. From the first I observed a strange reticence on her part during these shopping excursions, in strong contrast with her readiness to talk when alone with me. In the shops she says nothing at all, except in answer to direct questions, and then her words are as few as she can make them without discourtesy. Yesterday I asked her the reason for her silence, and, with that utter frankness which impresses me as one of the best traits in her character, she answered:

“‘It’s only that I don’t want to make you ashamed. You know I’m very ignorant, and I don’t always know the right way to say things. So I’ve made up my mind not to talk any more than I must, except when I’m alone with you, Mrs. Hargreaves.’



"I was so pleased with that mark of good feeling and instinctive consideration that I bade her quit calling me 'Mrs. Hargreaves' and call me 'Cousin Mary' instead.

"I like her very much, and it will be a great pleasure to me to help her in her effort to train herself. I wonder where and how she learned what she already knows of good manners and right feeling. Surely not from her illiterate mother whom you induced to give her up by a present of calico. That woman is a savage, but we'll make something greatly better out of Irene.

"If you approve, I shall keep her out of sight of company at Redrock until she drops what is left of her mountain dialect and manners. It will save her some humiliation if I do that, and it need not be for long, as she learns with really extraordinary rapidity and seems never to forget anything once learned, or to lapse into errors once corrected."

The thoughtful gentlewoman carried out her plans. On one pretence or another she remained at Lynchburg for nearly a fortnight. Then, securing an escort, she returned with her

102 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

charge to Redrock, where Irene's own impulse aided her in shielding the girl from other than the most casual contact with persons outside the household.

XI

COLONEL HARGREAVES and his friendly political rival, Judge Talley, kept faith with each other. Neither of them made any further attempt to win the favor of Judy Peters. But as the campaign was nearing its end Talley, whose appreciation of humor was especially keen, wrote to Hargreaves, saying:

“On the Saturday night before election, there is to be a great frolic at Judy’s — a gathering of the clans which will include every odd and interesting person in all that wild region. The two candidates for sheriff in Judy’s county have been waging a merciless battle of wits in an effort to win the favor of the Queen of the Mountains, but Judy declares that she ‘ain’t choosed betwix’ ’em yit,’ so there’s likely to be all sorts of fun on the occasion.

"I should like to see it all, and I think it would give you something to laugh over after you recover from the beating I'm going to give you at the polls. Of course under our compact, I can't be there unless you are there also. Won't you come? I'll have a vehicle of some inoffensively rude construction ready to take us up the mountain, and after the thing is over we shall both have time to get home before election day. Pray don't fail me. If you do you'll rob both yourself and me of the rarest sport imaginable. I promise not to talk politics or do anything else to curry favor up there and I know you won't. Send me word you'll come, and I'll be at the railroad station to meet you. Come on the early morning train, as this is to be an all day as well as all night affair, and we mustn't miss any of it."

Hargreaves replied hurriedly:

"Of course I'll join you. I'll probably make some bull calf blunder and forfeit whatever chance I have of Judy's favor and the votes she controls. But this election between you and me won't be decided by the votes of a few hundred mountaineers, and as a man interested

in the odder phases of human nature, I'm eager to see the mountaineers 'in action.' "

It was noon when the pair arrived at Judy's place, and that royal personage received them as cordially as if she hadn't heaped scorn upon them on the occasion of their former visit.

"Yous is jest in time fer dinner," she said, "an' I'm right glad to see yous. The frolickin' will begin 'bout two o'clock, an' when it's over I'll know fer sure an' sartain what sort o' fellers yous is. They's jest time to mend your drink afore Sapphiry gits the chicken an' per-taters on the table. Here's lookin' at yous!"

As she said this she raised a glass of apple brandy to her mouth and swallowed the whole of the fiery liquor at a gulp and without so much as winking. Her visitors pretended to sip their portions, for the sake of a keener and more prolonged enjoyment, and the moment her back was turned, each of them tossed the liquor out the open door.

"That was a risky thing to do," said Talley afterwards. "If she'd seen it she'd have sent us packing down the mountain without our dinners but fully fed on vituperation."

"Which on yous is a goin' to win?" asked Judy as they sat at dinner.

"That depends on how the people vote," said Hargreaves, with his blandest smile. "You see, Judy, Virginia is a large State, and it's pretty evenly divided in politics. So it's hard to tell what the result is to be. But really I mustn't talk politics. Talley and I have finished our campaign and we've come up here just to attend your festivities and enjoy ourselves."

"What's them things?" asked the old woman.

"What things?"

"W'y them as you spoke on jes' now — the things what yous come up here to enjoy?"

"Oh, festivities; I meant your frolic."

"Why didn't you say so then? Lem me tell you, Dick Hargreaves, us folks up here in the mountings don't like no jimcracks in your talk. I knowed a feller what I beat fer constable wunst 'ca'se he done that thar sort o' thing."

"Tell us about it, Judy," said Talley.

"What jimcracks did he emp— I mean what hifalutin words did he use?"

"Now you think you've got the laugh on me, Talley, but you ain't. I got Marcellus McGrath — he's a schoolmaster an' knows a lot — to learn me the word, an' I ain't never forgot it. It was 'prevaricates.' An' now what *do* you reckon he meant by it?"

"Oh, you must tell us that; we'd never guess."

"Wouldn't you now? Now, Talley, ef I was a mind to talk hifalutin I'd jest tell you as how you prevaricated when you said that."

"Oh, I see," said Talley, hoping to recover himself; "I had forgotten for the moment."

Judy looked at him steadily for ten seconds; then she said:

"This time it's plain lyin' you's a doin', Talley. Lemme give you some chicken."

At this point the dinner and the conversation were interrupted for a few minutes by the arrival of what appeared to be a vigilance committee, consisting of about a dozen lean mountaineers, each armed with a long rifle.

"Say, yous!" shouted Judy without rising

108 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

from the table, which sat in the great open passageway between the two log cabins, "clocks must be a runnin' o' races agin one another over whar yous come from. Yous wasn't axed to dinner, an' yous ain't 'spected to be here tell 'bout two 'clock. Go 'long out somewheres an' play mumble de peg, tell your time comes."

Some of the men apologized, offering various explanations of their mistake, but only one of them seemed to make any mollifying impression on Judy's mind. He was evidently a born diplomat.

"You see, Judy, it's jes' this away. When ornery folks gives us a invite, w'y we jes' lays round home tell the times comes, an' may be a little later. But when you bids us to a frolic, we's so full o' the glad we jes' can't rest tell we gits here. Howsomever, seein's you's got company we'll jes' go an' finish diggin' your petater patch fer you, a puttin' in the hours useful like tell the time's up fer the proceedin's to begin."

Hargreaves inquired of his hostess who the men were and why they had come armed.

"W'y, you see," she answered, "one o' them things what you come to enjoy — the 'festivities,' wa'n't it? — is to be a shootin' match fer a shoat, an' o' course them as is a goin' to shoot had to bring their shootin' irons along."

"Oh, I see. And the best shot gets the shoat?"

"Well, who ever heard the beat o' that? Gits the shoat? Well, I never! Whar was you raised anyhow? Didn't you never see a shootin' match?"

Hargreaves shamefacedly admitted that his life's experience had not included personal acquaintance with a contest of that character, and humbly begged to be enlightened.

"W'y, they's three prizes, always. The best shot gits both hind quarters; the nex' best gits one fore quarter an' the head; the third best gits the other fore quarter, an' the no 'counts gits theirselves laughed at."

"Who furnishes the shoat?" asked the gubernatorial aspirant. "I suppose it's paid for by subscrip— by chipping in?"

"Well, I reckon not. Not ef they's candidates anywheres around what 'ud like votes.

This yer shoat was put up by them two candidates fer sheriff. Bill Godsey he's one on 'em, an' Jake Thatcher he's t'other. Yo' see, ef they didn't go snooks on sich things, but set to biddin' agin one another, they'd spend their wages as sheriff 'fore the 'lection come round."

"I see clearly. Well now, Judy, my friend Talley and I have wound up our campaign, as we told you awhile ago, and are here just to see the fun and enjoy ourselves. But I feel, and I know Talley feels the same way, that we ought to contrib— I mean we ought to do our share to make the fun go. So what do you say, Talley, to going snooks for another shoat and some more shooting?"

Talley assented eagerly, but Judy, who liked variety in her entertainment, interrupted:

"Ef yous wants to see real fun fer yer money, better lemme send one o' them fellers down to Grimes's an' buy a big, long-tailed pig o' his'n, an' give a grease ketch. The boys'll like that better'n anything, an' you'll laugh yer ribs clean out'n yer sides a watchin' of 'em. Course Grimes'll cheat yous on the

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 111

price ef you send fer the pig in yer own names, so I'll do the buyin' fer yous."

Neither of the two gubernatorial aspirants had the smallest notion of what a "grease ketch" might be, but Judy's assurance as to the exceeding humor of it was sufficient, and they begged her at once to undertake the negotiation with Grimes. She raised her voice and called:

"Edgar Coffey, you come here."

When the man reached the entrance she said:

"I'se got a job fer you to do, Edgar, 'ca'se you's the slickest skinflint in these here mountings, an' it's Dave Grimes you's got to deal with. He'd cheat the gallus itself ef he had half a chance, but you'd git the rope throw'd in fer boot."

The man smiled deprecatively as if pleased with the royal recognition of his qualities and accomplishments.

"These here fellers," Judy continued, "is a goin' to give a pig fer a grease ketch, an' Grimes is got jest the pig we wants fer it. Go down thar an' buy it — the long-tailed one,

you know. Buy it fer yerself like, tell you git yer han's on it, an' git the price fixed right, an' then you jes' tell him as how it's fer Judy Peters, an' she'll settle fer it."

Then turning to her distinguished guests she explained:

"Grimes owes me three dollars fer apple brandy an' he's wuss pay 'an Edgar Coffey hisself."

Thus again complimented the long-legged mountaineer set off on his quest. Within the hour he returned, bearing the pig in a coffee sack, and as the guests were by that time assembling in droves, Judy decreed that the entertainment should begin without further delay.

Judy was herself stage manager, referee, and programme in one. She decided upon the order in which things should be done, and announced each contest in its turn with whatever rules of the game she intended to enforce.

She decreed that the shooting match should come first, and the reasons she assigned for that decision impressed Talley and Hargreaves as conclusive.

"Fust off," she explained, "a shootin' match is jest shootin' at a mark an' they ain't much fun in it 'ceptin' fer them as wins. 'Sides that, you wants the best light you can git fer shootin' an' the arternoons is a gittin' mighty short now. Seems like the sun's a gittin' tired an' a goin' to bed airly these days. Then agin all them fellers'll be half full o' apple jack 'fore long an' the'r shootin' 'ud be a disgrace to the mountings. So git at it."

After Judy had decided between the closely matched riflemen and had awarded the prizes, there came other and more exciting contests of skill, but it was not until the Queen called for the "grease ketch" that the interest of the outdoor sports reached its climax. In announcing it Judy said to her subjects:

"The pig what's to be used in this yer grease ketch was give fer the 'casion by Talley an' Hargreaves, j'intly. So fust off le's give three cheers fer both on 'em, jes' on account o' the pig."

The men cheered lustily, while the women displayed their "Sunday go to meetin'" hand-

kerchiefs, waving them to emphasize the odors of lemon extract and garden bergamot with which they had been perfumed.

Then preparations were made for the grease ketch. The tail and rump of the pig were lavishly greased with lard; the men were ranged up in line and the pig released, after Judy had announced the rules of the game, which were simple enough. All the men were to chase the pig in one grand scramble; no man was to seize it otherwise than by the tail, and the first who succeeded in lifting it by that highly lubricated appendage, and raising it to the level of his own chin, should be declared winner of the first prize — the two hind quarters as before. The one who next performed the feat, after a fresh greasing, should be second and receive the fore quarters. The one who should manage to get himself worst hurt in the scramble was to have the head and tail as a booby or consolation prize.

It is an easy thing to chase a pig and seize it by the tail; but it is a very difficult thing indeed to maintain a grasp of a liberally lubricated pig's tail, and when no less than thirty

or forty men are chasing the same pig at the same time in a half acre lot full of tree stumps and piles of loose stone, the struggle is apt to take on some of the characteristics of a free fight. In this case the reckless eagerness of the contestants was highly stimulated by the presence and the enthusiasm of their sweethearts and those whom they hoped to win as sweethearts. Every young man who had already found favor in the eyes of the girl of his choice fought madly for success by way of emphasizing his prowess. Those who still timidly hoped for a favor not yet won had a still stronger stimulus to endeavor, while those who were rivals for the favor of some highland coquette and who felt that their inamorata had not yet "choosed betwixt them," had jealous rage as well as the promptings of love to urge them on.

There were ugly falls, involving cuts that bled and bruises that ached, but these hurts were welcomed rather than regretted by stalwart young mountaineers who expected as their reward the tender ministrations and sympathy of beauties who knew how to be sweetly

116 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

soothing as well as how to be scorchingly scornful upon occasion.

There was a deal of hard-fisted slugging too — slugging less scientific perhaps but no less fierce than that which gives grace and dignity to a college football game.

For a time the mad scramble continued without results of any kind. Indeed both Talley and Hargreaves were beginning to doubt the possibility of results, when suddenly Edgar Coffey extricated himself from a pile of prostrate men and with a shout held the captive pig up to the level of his face. It was only a second before his hold gave way, but that second was in itself enough to make him first prize winner; or rather it would have been but for the shrewdness of Judy. As soon as the cheering ceased the Queen of the Mountains, who sat in a large rocking chair as on a throne, called out sharply:

“Edgar Coffey, come here!”

The summons to the royal presence had no suggestion of threat in it. It was Judy's practice on such occasions thus to call each successful contestant to her and then formally to

announce his victory. So Edgar Coffey strode proudly toward Judy's throne, wiping his hands on his trousers as he went.

But when he faced her, he saw something in her countenance that seemed to promise no good to him.

"I ain't never noticed afore," she said, "as how you was left-handed, Edgar."

"W'y, I ain't."

"Well, then, how'd you come to git the pig with your left hand?"

"Oh, in a grease ketch I always make both my han's do their duty," Coffey answered with confidence.

"Turn yer lef' han' breeches pocket inside out," commanded the mountain Portia.

"What's that fer?" asked the man in manifest trepidation.

"W'y, it's jest to see what you's got into it. I seen you fumblin' round in it more'n wunst while the fun was a goin' on an' some-hows er another it made me curious like. Turn it inside out, an' don't stan' there a gapin' like a ijiot."

Coffey reluctantly obeyed, and when a hand-

ful of sand fell upon the ground Judy jeeringly addressed the culprit:

"Edgar Coffey, you is purty slick at cheatin', an' you generally plays your hand so as not to git kotchted. But this time you has made a mistake. You ortn't to 'a' tried yer tricks on *me*. You'd orter kep' 'em fer use on folks what's green an' unsuspecting like. That ketch was a foul an' it'll all begin over agin, with you not in it. Let this be a warnin' to you, Edgar, that the preachers is mighty right when they says, says they, 'the way o' the transgressor's hard.' Grease the pig agin, boys!"

When at last the contest was decided, the victors proclaimed and the victims bandaged and lotioned, and sweetly comforted, the night was near at hand, and preparation must be made for the climax of the frolic — the dance in the evening.

Supper — a banquet furnished by contribution and cooked on the premises by the women present — was served first, Judy saying in justification of that arrangement, "My motto is 'business before pleasure,' always."

The coming dance very naturally constituted the chief topic of conversation during the meal, the more so because something like disaster had befallen. The fiddler who usually officiated on these occasions had suddenly fallen ill. The only thing to be done was, as one pessimist declared, to "put up with the scrapin' an' screechin' Bill Jones's boy Jim can make. He calls it fiddlin' an' maybe 'twas purty good fiddlin' afore tunes come into fashion. Fer my part I'd rather dance to a nigger's clappin' on his thighs."

This was Godsey's opportunity. He and Thatcher — rival candidates for sheriff — had joined in several of the sporting contests of the day, and his clumsy lack of skill had cost him a good deal of favor in the eyes both of the mountaineers who called him "a stick," and of Judy Peters who pronounced him "a frost-bit tater vine." It happened that he possessed a certain skill of the kind just now needed. He was not a violinist, but he was an unusually clever fiddler. He played by ear only, but he knew all the dance music of the time, and he could play it with so much life and glibness

that his admiring hearers often said he "can make a fiddle fairly talk."

Here then was his opportunity to recover lost prestige. Raising his voice and addressing Judy, at the opposite end of the table, so that all might hear, he said:

"Maybe I can be of service in this time of need. It happens that I can play the fiddle a little, and down in the lower country where I come from, I most generally do the playing when there's a dance on. I didn't bring my fiddle with me, but perhaps the gentleman who generally plays for you will lend me his for the occasion."

"You can bet your bottom dollar he will," said Judy, gladdened by the improved prospect. "Bob Dempsey, you mosey over to his place an' tell him I want his fiddle. Tell him *I* want it, an' don't you dare to put a foot on this here place till you gits it — do you hear?"

The violin was brought by the time the floors were cleared, and Godsey found it a really good one, which he had musical ear enough to appreciate. But to the surprise of the company, he held the bow in his left hand.

He was in fact helplessly left-handed, and, having been his own and only musical instructor, he had learned to play in that peculiar fashion.

The fact was soon forgotten by the company in its delight with the quality of Godsey's playing. It was superior to any "fiddling" they had ever heard, both in its accuracy and in its spirit. The fiddler seemed to enjoy making the music as keenly as the company enjoyed dancing to it. In point of fact he enjoyed it so much that instead of resting between the dances, he devoted the time to the playing of his most ambitious selections.

The shadow that had fallen upon his reputation during the afternoon sports was dissipated before the first dance ended. So were the dancers. That is to say they were as liberal in drinking the hot apple toddy which filled a huge bucket in the corner, as Judy had been in providing it. Their potations added to the enthusiasm awakened by the music, and the dancing had not lasted very long before Judy began to give nods and hints to her followers which they easily and correctly interpreted to

mean that she had "choosed betwix' " Godsey and his rival, and that the choice had fallen upon the fiddler. The mountaineers were neither skilled in disguising their emotions, nor desirous of learning that art. Every man among them wanted to drink with Godsey, and when he — foreseeing a paralysis of his power under so great and oft repeated an irrigation — sought to excuse himself somewhat, Judy came to his rescue, saying:

" See here, yous! Y'ain't a playin' fair with Godsey. He's a good feller, an' any feller what can play the fiddle like he can can stand up to his drink like a man, o' course. But yous is a tryin' to make him stand up to it like a whole company o' hoss soldiers. D'you reckon he can drink with all on you one at a time an' stand it? Ef you do y'ain't got the sense the law allows you. Now he ain't a goin' to do no more single harness drinkin'. Ef he drinks with one o' yous he'll drink with all o' yous at wunst, an' all o' you at wunst'll drink with him. Them's orders!"

With every minute of the fast and furious

dancing, Godsey's star rose higher and higher. The men sounded his praises not only to him and to each other, but to his rival as well. The franker ones among them, who had strongly favored Thatcher before, now told him candidly that he had no chance "in the mountings," and it was certain that if Judy's following should vote solidly in a county election, they could easily decide it.

Thatcher was greatly troubled over the situation, which was rapidly becoming worse, until now almost every mountain belle he asked to dance with him pleaded a previous engagement in excuse. She did not put the matter in precisely that way, but it meant much the same thing when she said: "I'm taken fer that dance a'ready," or "Somebody's bespoke me 'fore you axed."

It was clear that he must find some way of stemming the tide of his rival's popularity, or give up all hope of election. He volunteered to entertain the company by dancing a combined jig and walk-around, and he did the thing very cleverly until in the most difficult and brilliant part of it one of the violin strings

snapped, and the dance had to stop while the left-handed fiddler repaired the damage.

This mishap not only spoiled the performance just as it was becoming interesting, but it aroused a wholly unreasonable resentment on the part of the guests. Their candor — increasing as their logical perceptions lost vigor — led them openly to express the opinion that :

“ He done it a purpose; he seed he couldn’t keep the thing up an’ so he jest got one o’ them all-fired fiddle strings to help him out by breakin’.”

Thatcher, hearing utterances of that kind all about him decided upon a countermine. Betaking himself to Judy’s side, and handing her a glass of the apple toddy, he left her to open a conversation which he fully meant to direct. As he expected her to do, she thanked him for the alcoholic attention, adding :

“ You’re a good feller, Thatcher, in your way, only it’s a mighty bad way. No, Thatcher, you can’t fiddle an’ you ain’t got the ’complishments what a sheriff o’ this here county has got need to have. Jest see how Godsey swings that air fiddle bow!”

"Yes," answered Thatcher, with a reserved air; "yes, he can play the fiddle. I've heard him play down there among the fine plantation folks. I must say he's doing pretty well now — at least he thinks left-handed fiddling is good enough for people up here in the mountains. I don't like to have my mountain friends slighted in that way, and especially in your hospitable house, Judy, but if you don't mind I suppose it's none of my business."

"Now look here, Thatcher, d'you mean he's a playin' tricks?"

"Oh, I don't know that I ought to have said anything, seeing that everybody else seems satisfied. But I'm fond of my mountain friends, and naturally it gravels me when I see a man turning up his nose at them and putting them off with left-handed fiddling, instead of giving them his best as he does the rich plantation people. Still I oughtn't to have said anything."

"We'll see about that. Godsey," she cried, interrupting a dance that was just beginning; "Godsey, you plays mighty fine even with your left hand, an' as a sort o' show o' what

you can do it's real fine an' interestin'. But now us folks wants some o' the real thing. Give us some right-handed fiddlin' same as you gives the stuck ups."

The demand was caught up and eagerly pressed by the entire company. The wits of the mountaineers were somewhat dulled by their potations, but they were quick to catch the suggestion that this man was putting an affront upon them and that Judy's extraordinary sagacity had discovered the fact.

Poor Godsey was helpless. It was in vain for him to protest that he could not play with the bow in his right hand. The clamorous mountaineers would not hear and their queen refused to believe his statement. The men, soft and persuasive in their first demands, quickly grew angry and insistent, while Judy sat smiling and rejoicing in the opportunity of showing Talley and Hargreaves how boundless her authority was, and with what blind, unreasoning loyalty her subjects supported her decrees. To all appeals she answered:

"Us folks is as good as the stuck ups, an' we wants the best they is, *particular* from

candidates what's a beggin' fer votes. Give us some right-handed fiddlin' er git out o' the mountings!"

Her words suggested to her hearers the maddening thought that their rights as free-men had been somehow invaded, and during generations past they and their forebears had always been quick to rise in revolt at that suggestion.

The scene was rapidly becoming a riot when Judy put an end to it by saying:

"It's midnight, an' the holy Sabbath is come. The dancin' must stop, an' so must the drinkin' as soon as what's in the bucket is dranked up, quiet like. Then everybody what's a goin' home must go, an' everybody what's a goin' to stay here must be a lookin' fer soft spots in the floor to sleep on. As fer you, Bill Godsey, you'd better git down the mounting afore the daylight comes, er somebody'll be tempted to perfane the holy Sabbath day, as the preachers says, by carryin' you down, bare back on a fence rail. Us folks ain't got no sort o' use fer no left-handed fiddler in these mountings, specially on the holy Sabbath, an'

128 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

I'm a red headed woodpecker ef we's a goin' to put up with any sort o' airs."

It is perhaps needless to record the fact that at the election on the next Tuesday the mountain vote was solid for Thatcher, and poor Godsey was overwhelmingly beaten.

XII

ON her arrival at Redrock Irene was deeply impressed with the strangeness of a life so new to her, so utterly foreign indeed even to her dreams. The impression was partly a pleasant one, but in the main it was one of fright. Like other wild creatures of the mountains the girl was shy and disposed to distrust things to which she was unaccustomed. The very newness of this life to her made it seem appalling. She was almost morbidly distrustful of herself, and was distressed by the conviction that she could never learn to take her part in such a life with grace and ease, as the members of the family did.

She had known, in a vague, half-believing way, that the planter folk lived differently from the people of the mountains, but she had never imagined how differently. Even external and purely material differences impressed

130 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

her. The hardwood floors, polished daily to so perfect a finish that they seemed as treacherous as ice under her unaccustomed feet; the rugs that lay here and there in every room; the old time-darkened mahogany furniture; the lace and silken curtains at the windows; the spaciousness of the rooms and the porches, the abundance at table, the multitude of servants about the house — these and a score of other things impressed her as indications of a wealth and luxury such as her imagination had never pictured to her mind even as a possibility.

She had read a few English novels, but the life of country houses pictured in them had seemed to her much the same as the conditions set forth in fairy stories. It had never occurred to her that anybody really lived in that way. Now that she found herself in the midst of surroundings even more picturesque, and expected to become part of a life even more self centred and equable, it is not surprising that she was frightened.

Mrs. Hargreaves did much to reassure her in gentle, considerate ways, and so did Miss

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 131

Pollack, while Aunt Susan simply "took her for granted" in a way that was comforting. But it was Helen who did most and did it quickest, to put her at her ease.

Helen was a girl about her own age, though precisely how old Irene was, nobody knew with certainty. Colonel Hargreaves had made inquiries on that point without definite results. McGrath had only the dreamiest impressions concerning the matter. The date of his daughter's birth was a fact nowhere recorded in any of the books or newspapers from which he had filled his mind with miscellaneous information that in its vastness, its confusion and its worthlessness resembled nothing so much as the contents of some long disused attic. The girl's mother was equally unable to answer the question. Her most lucid answer was:

"They's been so many things to think of sence she was borned, I disremember. Oh, they's one p'int I'm sure of; she was borned on a Tuesday. I rec'lect that 'ca'se I rec'lect bein' glad she didn't git here a day late, fer ef she'd a been borned on a Wednesday her eyes would 'a' looked two ways fer Sunday, an' I

132 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

never could abear a wall-eyed gal. I disremember the year, but she was borned on a Tuesday, you can bet your bottom dollar on that."

It was easy to see, however, that she and Helen Hargreaves were very nearly of the same age, and for Irene the fact was a fortunate one. Helen was a pleasing combination of sentiment and practical common sense. She had an exalted sense of what she called justice, which in her attitude toward others meant limitless forbearance and an unstinted kindness that was quick to ripen into tender affection. She had, besides, the gift of understanding without being told and giving sympathy without being asked for it.

She quickly and instinctively understood Irene's embarrassment, and without a suggestion of the fact, she set herself to relieve it.

"You and I are going to be chums, Irene, if you'll let me. You see I'm the oldest girl in this family and so I never had a chum. My sisters are so much younger, you know. Mary is only ten, and Betty is a little tot — so little that I never know her age without looking it



up in the family Bible. But I'm not going to force myself upon you. It's only that we must get our lessons together and — ”

“ But you're so much better educated,” answered Irene in alarm; “ I can't get your kind of lessons I reckon.”

“ So much the better,” said Helen persuasively. “ I can help you with your lessons, and it'll be good for me, for let me tell you a secret, — I don't know anything very well and I'm always forgetting things I ought to know, particularly arithmetic things. Don't tell anybody, Irene, but I really don't know the multiplication table except by counting up on my fingers, and even then I often get it wrong. Do you know it? ”

“ Yes — and it's about all I do know. You see my father — ”

She hesitated, for the reason that she had made up her mind to say as little as possible about her own bringing up, lest her new friends should be embarrassed. After a pause she finished the sentence — “ my father taught me that thoroughly.”

“ Good! Then you can help me to learn it,

134 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

and I'll help you all I can with the other things. Anyhow you and I are going to be chums. We'll spend most of our time in the office — that's the building out there in the yard. We use it as a schoolroom. And when there's too much company in the house, why, we can just stay where we are. The servants always keep a good big fire in the chimney there, and we can roast apples and eggs, and have lovely times."

In Virginia, where hospitality was boundless, house-room must of necessity be elastic, and by way of securing such elasticity many of the larger plantation houses were equipped with one or two "offices" within the house-grounds. These were usually neat wooden or brick buildings, one story in height, and having two rooms each, with spacious fire places and broad porches.

Helen was in many ways mature beyond her seventeen years. In company she was dignified, sometimes even to the verge of haughtiness, and in all the serious relations of life she was thoughtful, considerate of others, and womanly-wise far beyond the common. But

she had not yet outgrown her childhood, in spirit at least, and in a healthy liking for the simple things of life. In these early conversations with Irene, she was not consciously "talking down" at her companion; she was simply letting the child side of her nature have free play. Her desire was eager to become thoroughly acquainted with Irene, and to put Irene at her ease. In this she succeeded so well that not many days had passed before a close and abiding friendship was established between the two.

More important still, not many days had passed before Irene, to her own astonishment, had become so far used to the new life as to feel very little embarrassment in it. She had a certain instinctive dignity which served her well on the infrequent occasions when she must meet guests of the house, and her shy reticence helped greatly. Moreover, she was quick to learn and quicker still to imitate, and with the well bred and perfectly self-possessed Helen for her model she rapidly acquired a pleasing manner that saved her to a great extent from observation. All that guests in the

136 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

house knew of her was that she was a child, the daughter of some old schoolmate of Colonel Hargreaves, who had come to Redrock to be educated with Helen. As she was in no way talkative or otherwise aggressive, visitors naturally concerned themselves no further about her.

Then too, she always had Helen to shield her from embarrassment. The two had become something more than friends. They were intimates, each loving the other, and Helen jealously determined that no touch of annoyance should pain Irene.

With a candor born of inherent honesty and quickened by a proud determination to make no false pretence, Irene said to her friend one day:

"You know, Helen, I'm poor white trash, and —"

"You're nothing of the kind," interrupted Helen. "You may be poor, and with your blonde complexion you certainly are white, but you're not trash, and you sha'n't call yourself so. You're my friend, my chum; you're just like a sister to me."

“I only meant that I haven’t been brought up right — in fact I haven’t been brought up at all. My people are ignorant mountaineers, though my father was born a gentleman, I believe. Anyhow I grew up among ignorant people who talk a terrible, low-down dialect, and though I am trying hard to throw it off, I often find myself talking that way. When I know it, I quit it, but you see I don’t always know it. Sometimes I use wrong words or pronounce them wrong simply because I don’t know any better. That’s what I was coming to. When I speak dialect I want you to tell me about it, please, and I’ll try hard not to do it again.”

With a candor equally inborn and prompted by her jealous determination that nobody should have occasion to think ill of her friend, Helen complied with this request with merciless faithfulness.

That was not all. When Irene made any slip in speech in the presence of others, Helen presently managed to use some equally uncouth locution, pretending that both were mere play, that both were quotations as it were,

138 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

from dialect speech, employed in a spirit of fun and innocent mockery.

In the meanwhile Irene gained confidence in herself and won favor in all eyes at Redrock. Her beauty — only beginning to mature as yet — was in itself winning. Her sweetness of disposition, her modesty, her candor, and the utter transparency of her nature were greatly endearing, and as her speech and manners were rapidly conformed to her new surroundings, there was nothing to remind those who saw most of her that she was not in fact the sister that Helen had called her. The two lived always together. By the choice of both they occupied the same room, and the same maid looked after them. They studied together, and Irene being much the quicker, was not long in closing the gap between their several attainments.

Thus rapidly and easily the little mountain maid grew into the new life and learned to love both it and its people.

XIII

THE political campaign of that year had begun early, so that it was a long one. The two political parties in the State were so evenly matched that a few hundred votes one way or the other might determine the result. Both parties canvassed diligently therefore, neither relaxing its activity until election day came.

In Colonel Hargreaves's own county his enthusiastic friends arranged to hold a barbecue and tournament — with political speaking — late in October, and only a few days before the election. The festivity was certain to bring out pretty nearly every voter in the county, and the persuasive eloquence of Colonel Hargreaves and other speakers on his side was relied upon to win every vote that still remained uncertain.

The time of year was inappropriate for such

a festivity — June and July being the usual months for outdoor gatherings — but in Virginia October is apt to be a smiling season, and the political necessity was pressing. So the barbecue and tournament were decided upon.

Everybody knows what a barbecue is, and on this occasion a Brunswick stew, with squirrels for its basic principle, was added to the roast ox and whole roast sheep and pigs. But not everybody in this unromantic age knows what a Virginia tournament of that old time was like. It may be worth while to tell of it briefly.

It had for its far distant model and prototype, of course, the tournament of which Scott gave so entertaining an account in *Ivanhoe*. But the differences were more pronounced than the points of resemblance.

The young men who expected to participate began their preparations a week or two in advance, by personally grooming their steeds for the occasion, oiling their coats, and wetting and braiding their manes and tails, so that when combed out on the morning of the tournament

those hairy appendages should present an extreme example of what women call crimping. Each young gentleman practised daily also, in order to perfect his skill in the work to be done for glory.

Each of the contestants dubbed himself knight of something or other, quite in mediæval style. It was observable that lovelorn youths were especially disposed to choose melancholy and even lachrymose titles — “ Knight of the Rueful Countenance,” “ Knight of the Disappointed Hope,” “ The Rejected Knight,” etc. But there were young fellows of healthier minds and less ambitious imaginations, who were content to be knights of the plantations on which they lived, or knights of the rivers and creeks of the country, and the like.

The lists consisted of a roped-off stretch, over which hung three wires, thirty or forty yards apart, each carrying a small ring suspended in air.

The knights were required, each in his turn, to ride at full speed toward the rings, and endeavor to pass his spear through each, letting them slip back to his hand.

The knight who succeeded in spearing the greatest number of rings, was declared victor, and at the dance which followed in the evening it was his privilege to place a wreath of flowers on the head of his lady-love, crowning her "Queen of Love and Beauty." If she accepted the honor, she remained the belle of the ball throughout the evening. The second and third best of the knights chose and garlanded their sweethearts as the Queen's "Ladies of Honor."

If the victor happened to be the "Knight of the Rueful Countenance" or any other of those whose choice of titles indicated a recent disappointment in love, he ran serious risk of having the lady of his choice scornfully put aside the queenly crown. Such refusal on her part was regarded as a public and of course final rejection of his suit, although if she accepted the honor, her acceptance in no way committed her to anything. She was entirely free the next day to reject a proffer of love from the gallant knight who had chosen her queen.

Somehow young women always manage

things of that sort to their own unfair advantage.

Everybody went to the barbecue and tournament of course and everybody seemed limitlessly happy, especially the political speakers, who rejoiced in a larger audience than usually assembled to hear their eloquence "wreak itself upon expression."

Helen and Irene went in a little phaeton-like carriage of Helen's own. They enjoyed the privilege of seeing everybody and everything without being themselves the objects of curious attention. They were too young yet for that. Everybody had a pleasant word for them, but they were not pestered, as many of the older young women were, by attentions from swarms of young gallants gathered about their carriage.

The vulgarity of throwing girls upon the matrimonial market by the process known as "bringing out" was wholly unknown in the Virginia of that time, but custom required that girls still at school, or still under the care of a governess, should be regarded as too young to be open to any sort of sweethearting atten-

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144 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

tion. Thus Irene and Helen, as Irene rejoicingly said, "had all the fun without the flummery" of the occasion. They were at the age which gives to girls the greatest and most enjoyable liberty that life is likely ever to afford them.

Many of Helen's acquaintances came to speak to "the girls," and to ask them if they were enjoying themselves and to indulge in the other commonplaces of friendly courtesy, but from any more marked attention they were happily exempt.

Tom Hardaway and his friend Jack Towns were attentive to their wants when the feast was served, and when the girls declined further dainties the two young men made their adieus. As they walked away, Jack Towns turned to Tom and asked:

"I say, Tom, who the deuce is the girl anyhow? I never heard of her before, but do you know she's going to be a positively entrancing beauty a year or two hence? Who is she?"

"I hardly know," answered Tom, "except that she's the daughter of some old schoolmate of Colonel Hargreaves, who has come to Red-

rock to be educated with Helen. I never saw her but once before to-day, and then it was a mere glimpse. She seems to be a shy creature, and she and Helen keep themselves very much to themselves at Redrock. I dine there, you know, about once a week, but I never saw or heard of the girl till she had been there more than a month, and I haven't seen her since till to-day. Her name is Irene McGrath."

"That accounts for it," said Jack.

"Accounts for what?"

"Why, for her marvellous complexion. McGrath — that's Scotch or Irish or what they call Scotch-Irish. It's the Irish blood in her veins that gives her that wonderful skin. And what eyes she has! They are like blue moons, and they're positively transparent. Looking into those eyes will make or destroy some fine fellow's happiness some day."

"What's the matter with you, Jack? If the girl were grown up — I take her to be about sixteen now — I'd think you were in love with her."

"I'm in love with what she promises to be two or three years hence. There's no more

harm in that than in being entranced with a beautiful dream. Where does she live?"

"At Redrock, just now. I don't know where else."

"Tom Hardaway, you're the coldest-blooded creature I ever knew, and —"

"And you are making a donkey of yourself. Come on and forget your dream, or it'll give you trouble some of these days. The idea of a man like you, hard-headed and sagacious young lawyer that you are, letting himself rave over a bread and butter miss whom he never saw before and who will probably flit away long before she grows old enough to make such raving proper conduct on your part!"

"Why, isn't she to stay at Redrock till her education is —"

"I don't know. I tell you I don't know anything about her or her people, or her history, or her plans, or her anything else."

While this conversation was in progress the two girls sat in their phaeton on the outskirts of the crowd, observing the people who were of all sorts and conditions. Presently Irene

forgot herself and committed an indiscretion. She rose in the carriage and called:

"Lem! Lem Fulcher! Come here! It's me—" she caught herself in the ungrammatical usage, but did not correct it; she thought Lem might not understand.

Lem heard and heeded the summons. He was a lank mountaineer, a neighbor of Irene's father and a man whom the girl had known all her life, and whom she liked for his kindness.

"W'y, ef 'tain't little Irene! Shore 'nuff it's you, an' you ain't stuck up a bit, fer all yer fine clo'se an' yer fine friends. Y'ain't shamed to speak to your old friends, an' that's fine. I seen you fust off but I didn't let on. I says to myself, says I, 'May be it wouldn't be jest the thing, — mout make the gal 'shamed.' So I wasn't a goin' to let on I seen you. But you jest called my name right out, an' you're a shakin' hans with me. Don't it beat all?"

"Lem, this is my friend Miss Helen Hargreaves. Helen, Lem is an old friend of mine, so I just couldn't help —"

148 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

She didn't finish the sentence for the reason that Helen broke in with a kindly greeting of her own for the mountaineer.

Lem explained that he was employed by a drover who was selling horses in that part of the country. Thereupon Helen said:

"I'm glad of that. May be you will help me by picking out a good, well broken horse, for Irene to ride. I'm looking for a horse of that kind."

Lem chuckled.

"Reckon you're lucky, Miss, in axin' me, 'stid o' the drover. He'd 'a' sold you somethin' you don't noways want, an' I may jest as well tell you fust off as how he's got jest about the no-'countedest c'lection o' damaged hoss flesh y' ever seen er didn't see. I hope, Miss, you'll git the hoss you're a wantin' of, but you won't git it from Abe Coakley — that's his name."

"Thank you for telling me," said Helen, with a smile called forth by the peculiarities of the dialect. She had never heard it used unrestrainedly before.

Then Lem told Irene that her people were



"LEM! LEM FULCHER! COME HERE!"—Page 147.

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well when he left the mountains, and that he was going back immediately, adding :

“ I’m a goin’ to tell ’em I seen you an’ you jest up an’ knew me, same as ef I was a slick plantation feller. Good-bye. I must be off now. ’Sides ’twouldn’t be jest the thing fer me to be — ”

The end of the sentence was lost as the lank mountaineer strode away.

“ Did I do wrong, Helen? ” asked Irene. “ I was so surprised, and Lem is so good. ”

“ I reckon it is never wrong to do right, Irene, and if you had ignored your mountain friend, I shouldn’t have liked you half so well as I do. ”

“ Thank you ! ” answered Irene. Then after a moment’s thought she said :

“ You see I’m always afraid of making you ashamed. That is why I had to think things out before I made up my mind to come to Red-rock, and now that I know you all and love you, it is worse than I thought it would be. If things were different — I can’t say what I feel, Helen, only I can’t forget the people who were good to me in the mountains, and I don’t

want to. But they're so different. Anyhow most of them are good men and women and I suppose they can't help being ignorant."

"No," said Helen gently, "but my father says that we who are better off can help them to help it. He says it's a shame the State doesn't give them better schools and better teachers. If he is elected Governor, — as I don't suppose he will be, — he intends to do all he can to bring about something of that kind. He's going to make his speech about that to-day."

At that moment Lem Fulcher reappeared. He had waited until everybody's attention was directed to the speakers' stand, so that his coming might not be observed by others to the embarrassment of the girls, for beneath his rough exterior this ignorant mountaineer cherished the instincts of a gentleman.

He came at once to the purpose that had brought him back, by saying to Irene:

"I reckon you'd be right glad ef Colonel Hargreaves was to git 'lected, wouldn't you, Irene?"

"I certainly should, Lem, and I hope you'll vote for him."

"I'll do that shore as shootin', but 'twa'n't that I was a thinkin' of. They say the 'lection's goin' to be mighty clos't, an' I'm a thinkin' they's some consid'able o' voters up our way. May be I can give 'em a few p'int. Anyhow I'm jest a startin' up that air way to try, an' I'm persuaded like as how I knows the ropes."

With a wink that was full of meaning, he took his leave, and Irene, turning to her companion, said:

"Lem can do what he said, if anybody can. He's ignorant, but he's very shrewd, and he knows everybody up our way. He'll influence a good many votes, and oh, I'm so glad!"

"That'll be your contribution to the cause, Irene, for it's only on your account that Lem is bothering himself about it. And Father says he never knew an election in which every vote counted for so much."

Jack Towns came up at the moment upon pretence of showing the girls a good place to

bestow their carriage and themselves while a certain fiery orator, who was about to speak, should hold forth, but really to get another look at Irene whose half-matured beauty had strangely fascinated him.

As Jack lingered round the carriage for as long a time as he thought propriety permitted, the conversation between the girls was not resumed. But as they sat there listening to the orator, Irene, hurriedly, and with a glad look in her face, said to her companion:

“Lem knows Judy very well indeed. May be he can do more than I thought.”

“Who is Judy?”

“The Queen of the Mountains. I’ll tell you all about her sometime.”

XIV

LEM FULCHER was indeed a very shrewd person, as Irene had said. He knew by instinct many of the arts that diplomatists learn only under instruction. He knew the wisdom of indirection in dealing with delicate questions and sensitive persons. Especially he knew Judy Peters, not only as a life-long acquaintance but as one who had often served her as a lieutenant, and who knew all the ins and outs of her methods.

On the day after the barbecue, Lem alighted from a belated train, and set out at once to walk up the mountain. He had gone only a mile or two, however, when he sat down by a roadside spring and assumed a position so studiously comfortable that an on-looker would have thought his journey done. With a glance at the sun, he muttered to himself :

154 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

" 'Twon't do to git thar afore 'long 'bout supper time, not ef I'm agoin' to stay thar all night an' have a talk, an' that air's jest percisely what Lem Fulcher's agoin' to do. Ef I git thar sooner 'n supper time she'll jest ax me the news an' then let me trapse on home. Ef I git thar late like, an' ain't too almighty fast in my talkin', she'll ax me to stay fer the night. I'll jest wait here tell the sun gits well down behind the mounting."

With that he stretched himself on the grass beside the spring and quickly fell asleep. But first he arranged for his waking at the proper time. He placed a flat stone under his head, saying:

"I reckon that rock'll git as hard as the heart of a sinner under my head jest 'bout wakin' time." This was one of many devices mountaineers resorted to when out hunting, by way of avoiding over-sleep.

The "rock" got hard and the head sore rather sooner than Lem had expected, but once awake he got up, stretched his legs, plunged his head into the pool below the spring, and sat down to wait for time, and to rehearse

again in his mind what he intended to say to Judy Peters.

When he reached Judy's house he found supper nearly over, but among the mountaineers hospitality had a very alert respect for hunger, and so Judy set to work to fry some additional slices of salt pork, while Sapphira, at her command, went to the spring and fetched a pitcher of cold buttermilk.

Lem ate as slowly as if he had been carefully trained in the etiquette of the table, and so directed the conversation as to make it time-consuming, lest the desired "bid to stay all night" might not be forthcoming. It was not till that "bid" had been given and accepted that he loosened his tongue to Judy's satisfaction.

"Y'ain't tole me 'bout Abe Coakley an' his hosses yit, Lem," said Judy persuasively as he and she sat smoking their corn cob pipes.

"Hosses?" exclaimed Lem in a tone of measureless disgust. "Them wa'n't hosses, Judy; they was the gol durnedest gang o' patched-up cripples y'ever seen. How he got

rid of 'em even a schoolmaster couldn't figger out, 'ceptin' he know'd Abe's slick tongue."

"He sold 'em all out, did he?" asked Judy by way of tempting her companion to further conversation.

"Yes — er nigh on to it. He hadn't more'n ten or a dozen o' the lot left when I come away, an' I reckon he's got shet o' them 'fore this time. You see when I left we was way down whar Colonel Hargreaves lives, an' they was a big barbecue a goin' on, an' I reckon a good many o' them fellers down that-a-way was purty full o' whiskey, an' Abe he was liberal-like in orderin', so I reckon a good many of 'em was in a condition to take the p'int of a hoss from his talk an' not do much lookin' fer themselves."

The mention of Hargreaves set Judy's curiosity agog.

"Did you see Dick Hargreaves yerself?" she asked.

"Not to speak to, but I heard him speechify a little, an' I tell you he's a good talker. I seed his daughter, an' had quite a little chinnin' with

her an' Irene McGrath. Them's awfully nice gals."

"Stuck up I reckon?" interposed Judy.

"Not a bit. W'y, they was a settin' in their carriage, with hundreds o' fine folks around when they seed me, an' would you believe it, they just stood up in the buggy an' hollered at me to come an' say howdy to 'em. They ain't stuck up a bit, and I reckon I know the reason. But I was a goin' to tell you 'bout Abe Coakley, an —"

"Never mind 'bout Abe Coakley. He can go git hisself hanged for all o' my carin'. Tell me 'bout Dick Hargreaves's gal an' Irene McGrath, and what you was a goin' to say 'bout the reason they ain't stuck up."

"Oh, that? Well, it's just this way; everybody down that a-way says Hargreaves is 'too democratic.' They says he's always a sympathizin' with poor folks what hadn't ort to be considered, an' all that. A good many o' the 'ristocrats down that a-way — what you might call the stuck ups — is a goin' to vote agin him jest fer that. They heard how he went to Marcellus McGrath's 'stid o' goin' to

158 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Talley's, an' they're a usin' it agin him. They say he's got low-down tastes an' is always a consortin' — whatever that means — with low-down, poor white trash, an' in the speech I heard him git off down there, he jest stood up an' talked right out in meetin'."

"Well, what did he tell 'em?"

✓ "W'y, he tole 'em he thought a mighty sight more of a poor man that hadn't got no schoolin' than he did o' them as kept sech people poor an' wouldn't give 'em a chanst. I disremember how he figgered it out, but he got hoppin' mad, an' raisin' hisself up on his toes he hol-lered at 'em that ef he was 'lected governor he'd do his durndest to make the State give everybody a real good schoolin' fer nothin' an' give every feller a chanst. Then he said as how them was his sentiments an' ef they didn't want to vote fer them sentiments, they mustn't vote for him. I tell *you*, Judy, he's got grit anyhow. I ain't no jedge o' candidates, like you is, but anyhow Dick Hargreaves ain't none o' yer palaverin' kind o' soft-soapy politicians that's afeard to say their souls is their own."

"So you come home on the rail cars, did you?" asked Judy, as if weary of the subject he had been talking about. "Is they as purty inside as folks is always a tellin' me they is?"

"W'y, I reckon so. They's got red velvety cushions on their benches, an' picters on their sides, an' blue an' red figgers on their ceilin's. I reckon may be you'd think they was purty, ef you rode in 'em."

"How's the apple crop down that a-way?"

"'Tain't nothin' to brag about, an' folks says it's been a bad year fer apples down that a-way. Still I seen a good many bar'ls o' fruit layin' round the railroad depots."

"Who tole you, Lem Fulcher, to say all that?"

"All what, Judy?"

"What you tole me 'bout Dick Hargreaves."

"W'y, nobody. You made me tell you yourself. I was a tellin' you 'bout Abe Coakley, an' you stopped me, an' wouldn't listen to nothing 'ceptin' 'bout Hargreaves."

Judy meditated in silence for a time. Perhaps she was recalling the details of the conversation and satisfying herself that this inter-

pretation of the matter was in accordance with the facts. After a minute or two of silence she rose, took a bottle of apple jack and two glasses from a shelf, and said:

"That's so, Lem. Take a drink with me."

Lem accepted the invitation.

"Drink hearty," she urged. "Now take another, 'ca'se you'll need the strength of it afore mornin'."

"How's that, Judy?" he asked as he replenished his tumbler.

"Why, I've choosed betwixt Hargreaves an' Talley, an' the mountings is a goin' fer Hargreaves. You is to go over to Rocky Fork to-night an' give the word there, an' I'll spread the news hereabouts. Rocky Fork's a good twenty mile away an' the walkin' ain't none o' the best, so you'd better start right away."

Lem's legs were good, and his joy at the triumph of his sly diplomacy added nimbleness to his footsteps as he went.

On the morning of election day, Irene, at Redrock, received a letter of uncouth appearance, which she bravely asked permission to open and read aloud at the breakfast table.

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 161

"It's from Lem Fulcher's wife," she said. "I never saw her, as he only recently married. She writes a fairly legible hand, but my, how she spells!" This was the letter:

"DEER MIS IREEN: Lem sez, sez he to me sez he 'You got to rite to Ireen;' cause I'm Lem's yf an he ain't never lernt to rite."

Irene puzzled a good while over the word "yf," the rest endeavoring to help her interpret it. Finally by pronouncing the names of the two letters in succession and with the mountain drawl, she discovered that "yf" was a phonetic spelling of the word "wife." It seems so exactly in harmony with the "simplified spelling" idea so passionately urged upon us in the beginning of the twentieth century, that it should certainly be included in the next list of reformed words sent out.

The letter continued:

"Lem sez, you is to be tole as how he's kep' his prommus, an pulled the ropes, an the moun-tings is a goin' to vote fer Mister Harggreev

162 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

solid. He sez to tel you its oll your own falt ef falt there be, an he dont reckon yous down that away is a goin to fine mutch falt nohow.

“ So no moor at prezint, from

“ Yours trully

“ SAMANTHA FULCHER,

✓ “ Lem’s yf what was Mis’ Boling.”

The promise of the letter was fulfilled. Not only did all Judy’s followers vote for Colonel Hargreaves, but Lem’s eloquence in cross roads talking was so effective in setting forth the candidate’s democracy of sentiment that pretty nearly all the men of the mountains became his enthusiastic partisans, and when the returns came in it was found that what the newspapers called the “ landslide in the mountains ” had elected him Governor.

When Helen told him the story of the encounter with Lem, and of the way in which Irene had won the heart of the simple mountaineer, Colonel Hargreaves said to the girl:

“ You’ve made me Governor, Irene, and the least I can do to reward you is to fulfil my promise and use my official influence to the

utmost in behalf of better schools and better life conditions for the mountaineers. If I can accomplish any good in that way, the merit of it will be yours only."

Irene was touched almost to tears, but she managed to control her voice.

"I'm very glad," she said, "if I have helped ever so little. Do you remember the letter I had from Samantha Fulcher, Colonel?"

He nodded.

"That's the sort of woman I should have grown up to be, if it hadn't been for you. Do you understand how I mean that?"

"I think I do," said the tender-hearted, generous gentleman, caressing her, "but you mustn't lay too much stress on my part of that, Irene. Gratitude is a sentiment that may easily become excessive and even morbid. And besides the little I am doing for you —"

Irene burst into tears and retreated to her room, so that the sentence was never completed and never answered.

XV

THE distance between Redrock plantation and Richmond was so small that during his first year in office Colonel Hargreaves occupied the Executive Mansion only as an official residence. He could drive to the city every morning and return in the evening, and upon those occasions when social functions of a semi-official character were necessary, Mrs. Hargreaves and he remained at the executive residence for so long a time as might be necessary. For the rest they lived at Redrock, and Helen and Irene — too young as yet to have any social existence — lived there all the time.

They were both good students, quick to learn and diligent in application, and as they had no social duties — no duties of any kind indeed except those relating to their studies — they were not long in finishing such courses

as Miss Ann personally taught, except the French in which every well-bred Virginia girl was expected to acquire ease and fluency. Miss Ann taught that language skilfully. She was herself almost French, being of Huguenot family, and having been educated in France during ten or a dozen years of her girlhood.

For the rest the girls had their piano lessons from Signor Carusi, an Italian master who visited Redrock weekly, while a young tutor who lived near by instructed them for an hour or two each day in what the Virginians called "the humanities," to wit, Latin, Grecian, and Roman history, and the mathematics.

Apart from these things they were as free as any colt on the plantation, and very nearly as wild — at least after the winter was past. Then, stoutly shod, they lived almost wholly out of doors, a life which Irene had taught Helen to love. They wandered in the woodlands, where they had a number of haunts in which to sit and read together by the hour. If they anticipated the coming of company to the house and wished to avoid it, they knew spots in the lushly growing corn where they could

hide themselves securely among stalks that grew to a height of ten or fifteen feet, and spread out their broad green blades till the space between the rows was completely screened from observation. If any visitor asked for them and a little negro was sent to call them, they had only to refrain from answering. If by any chance the little negro found their hiding place, they had only to give the young darkey a bit of candy in order to induce utter forgetfulness even of the errand with which he had been charged. If their simple gowns were soiled when at last they slipped into the house unseen, they knew that Jane, the maid who attended to their wants, would herself do all the scolding for which the "keerlessness" called, and would loyally refrain from mentioning the matter to any one else. She would threaten of course to "tell Miss Mary," but she never did, and if she had, Mrs. Hargreaves was too wise a woman to heed complaints of the wild, free life that was reddening the blood in their young veins and fitting them physically for a healthful and happy womanhood.

They read, at this time, voraciously and well nigh omnivorously. There was a well stocked library at Redrock, as there was in most of the plantation houses whose indwellers had come of cultured ancestry. It held all that was best of the English classics, together with such recent and current literature as appealed to any member of the family. For it was the good habit of the old Virginians to buy and own their books, in an age when free circulating libraries did not exist. Indeed the old Virginians would have regarded such libraries with a good deal of aversion and some fear, just as Washington regarded a proposal that he should shake hands with all comers at one of his levees. "Why, I might catch the itch," he is said to have replied.

Nevertheless the girls had another book collection to draw upon when the library at Redrock happened to lack a volume they wanted to read. Tom Hardaway's plantation lay not many miles away, and Tom was so reckless a book lover that he was popularly reported to "buy every book that comes out," except the Patent Office Reports and other public

168 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

documents, and they were sent to him gratuitously by the Congressman from his district.

Tom was a young bachelor, living alone upon a plantation of his own, which he had inherited from an aunt. His father and mother dwelt in the ancestral home some dozen miles away. The family was an old one, and his mother's family was dominated by aristocratic traditions and prejudices so strong that even Tom's literary democracy of taste was a sore trouble to the good lady's soul. She was "shocked — yes, positively shocked," Tom's mother once told him, that he should buy and actually read "the vulgar novels of low life with which that fellow Dickens is polluting our literature."

But Tom was a breezy, laughing law unto himself in such matters, and, as he had an independence of his own, and a plantation home all his own, where his vagaries of literary taste need offend nobody, he went on buying the books he wanted.

He had no special room for their bestowal. They were "all over the house," he told Helen and Irene; even the great stairway was so

crowded with the rude, plantation-made shelves that held them, as to hide the wainscot on the walls.

"But I know where every one of them lives," he said to Helen, "and I can put my hand on almost any one I want, even in the dark. You see I don't really read any of them except new ones. I've read the older ones already, and I know what each of them holds that I want. So I browse among them, reading the things I care for in each. Sometimes I go to bed — generally in fact — with a dozen or twenty of them piled up within easy reach, and if the candles don't go out too soon, I read something in every one of them before I go to sleep."

"At what hour do you go to sleep, Cousin Tom?" asked Helen, smiling over an eccentricity she already knew.

"Oh, any time between midnight and morning — that is to say, if I don't happen to get too much interested in some book I haven't read before. In that case I'm apt not to go to sleep till I hear the maids polishing the floors down stairs. You see sleeping is such

a waste of time when one has anything to do."

"But you must get some sleep, and of course you're obliged, as a planter, to get up early to see the horses fed."

"You're wrong, Helen. It isn't at all necessary for a planter to go to his stables every morning. That's a clumsy way of seeing that things are done properly. I manage it much better. I don't go to the stables every morning, but the negroes never know when I am going. Sometimes I go so early that they find me there when they come. Sometimes I turn up while they are currying. And they never know, when they don't find me there, whether I'm in bed or out with my gun, or over in the prize barn ready to appear at any moment. So they do their work as well one day as another. And as for sleep, if I find I haven't had enough during the night I can easily make up the deficiency during the day. You see it's a mistake to suppose that one must have a bed and all the rest of the fixtures in order to get his sleep. One can sleep any-

where if he chooses. If I fall asleep in the porch and find myself enjoying it, I'm not idiot enough to rouse myself and say I must go to bed, and in that way knock all the sleep out of me. I just sit still and sleep as long as I like. When I've had my nap out, it may be nine o'clock at night or it may be two in the morning. In either case I've had my sleep out and am ready for bed and books. That's the real use of a bed — it's a comfortable place to read in. Anyhow, it's all nonsense to think you must go to bed because a certain hour has struck, and it's equally foolish to think you must go to sleep just because you're in bed. Why, I've known people to keep themselves awake nearly all night trying to sleep and worrying because they can't. How much better it would be to recognize the fact that they aren't sleepy and put in the time doing something better."

"I wonder," said Irene, "how you've managed to read so much as you evidently have, if you do it only at night."

"Oh, I don't. That's another mistake peo-

ple make, when they say they haven't time to read. Everybody has plenty of time for that, but most people waste it."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, they waste it in a dozen ways. Let me illustrate: I always keep one book open at my place in my bedroom, another, open in the same way in the parlor, and still another in the hall or dining room. If I send my boy down stairs for hot water while I'm dressing, I don't sit down and growl about how slow he is; I just take up my book and read till he comes, if he comes at all. If he doesn't I get so interested in the book that I forget all about the hot water and it is just as well. In the same way if I am down stairs and order my horse brought, I put in the time of waiting with one or the other of the books I have lying there open. Most people waste all such scraps of time as that, and then complain that they haven't time for reading. It's all nonsense. In the time they squander while waiting for things, they might read the whole body of English literature. Then there's another thing. Whenever I go out on horseback I carry one

or two books in my pocket. If the game doesn't turn up, or if it grows too hot, or if anything else happens, I pick out a cool, shady place and read awhile. That's why I fought against the proposed modernizing of the old church."

"Why, what has the church to do with what you've been talking about?"

"Oh, I see. I didn't connect one thought with the other by a verbal bridge. It's a bad habit I have not to do that. What I meant to say was that with the old high-backed pews as they are I can read several chapters during sermon time, while if they were removed and modern ones put in their places, common decency would forbid me even to take a book out of my pocket. But now I must come back to what I set out to say, which was that every book I've got is at your service whenever you want it. Just let me know when you want literature and I'll load a mule with books and send one of the chaps over with it. By the way, I brought you this morning three or four of Dickens's novels that I want you both to read. They'll amuse you mightily, and better

still they'll awaken your souls, teach you the gospel of human sympathy, and inspire your hearts with love for all human kind, the poor and ignorant and unfortunate, as well as those of your own class."

Tom still knew nothing definite of Irene's history, or perhaps he would not have offered a suggestion which in her case was superfluous. But the suggestion was not wasted. It set her thinking and her thinking had results. She realized, as she had never realized before, how great a disparity there was between her lot in life and that of the people among whom she had been born. Even her father and mother, and her brood of brothers, were of a class from which she had been completely snatched away. Her brothers were destined, doomed by poverty and circumstance, to walk in darkness all their lives, while the sunshine was hers by virtue of a good man's generous impulse.

"And here I have lived in happiness for a whole year, taking the good fortune that has fallen to me, and scarcely remembering the lot of those others!"

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 175

With that thought overwhelming her, she slipped away to "think it out," as she had done on the mountain top while her benefactor waited for her answer.

XVI

IRENE did not find it easy, this time, to “think it out” to the satisfaction of her mind. The matter, of her own position and of her relations with others, had not presented any question whatever to her mind until what Tom Hardaway said about Dickens’s gospel of human brotherhood and sympathy startled her out of her passivity. Until now she had taken things for granted in the spirit of childhood; now the woman in her was rudely awakened and would not be lulled to sleep again.

Now that she had set herself to “think it out,” she found the questions that presented themselves far more complex than any with which she had ever before had to deal. The worst of it was that those questions manifested a tendency to multiply themselves, each bringing forth a troublesome brood of others.

What right had she to be where she was and as she was? What right had she to live at ease and in the luxury of a plantation house, while those who should be nearest and dearest to her dwelt in rude surroundings and were doomed to lives of toil, privation and hardship? What right had she to accept an education that must utterly unfit her for association with them? Had not the difference already wrought robbed her of the capacity to sympathize with them? Had she not wronged them of their due in consenting thus to separate her life from theirs and build up an impassable barrier between herself and them?

These questions gave speedy birth to others in a mind that had grown alert under the stimulus of her new surroundings, and that had learned to think more subtly as it matured. After all was it wrong for her to make the most and best she could of the faculties God had given her? She saw clearly that the difference between herself and those from whose lives she had been separated was not altogether due to the accident of superior education and better surroundings. She was modest in self-

178 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

judgment, but even modesty could not wholly hide the truth that she had better natural capacities than they, a better brain, a more energetic character, and impulses of refinement which were wholly foreign and impossible to them.

"Even if I had remained among them," she reflected, "they and I would have been different, uncongenial, perhaps even antagonistic. I should have gone on reading and instinctively trying to lift myself above the level of the life about me and that would have widened the breach day by day. I should have gone on thinking, in a crude, ill directed way, and the result would have been to make me discontented and impatient with the limitations of the life I must lead. Would that have been better for them or for me, or for anybody? Would it not have made unhappiness the lot of all of us? Would it have been less selfish in me than the choice I made? I do not know. I cannot tell."

Then her thought wandered into another by-way of the maze. If her choice had been selfish

in its impulse was it not destined to work out its own retribution?

"After all," she asked herself, "what good is to come to me in compensation for all the harm this thing has done to others? I have been very, very happy here until now, but that was only because I didn't think or know how to think. What a childish thing I have been anyhow! But what of the future? After a year or two more of this, I shall be a highly educated, refined and cultivated woman, but what then? I shall still be 'poor white trash' among people who never forget to inquire who one's father and grandfather were. What part can I play among such? What place is there for me in the only life for which I shall be fit? People will be kind to me of course — they are kind to dumb brutes. They will deal gently with me because they pity me. God knows I had rather they held me their enemy, for then I could fight them with my wits, which are certainly as good as theirs. Their kindness will be a cruelty, because it will be due to compassion, an insult because of its origin in pity."

Thus for days after that little talk with Tom Hardaway, the girl scourged herself with questions she could not answer and tormenting reflections from which there was no way of escape. The instinct of the wild creature she had been was still strong in her, and was in futile, hopeless, desperate revolt against circumstances that seemed to shut in her soul on every side.

During these days of spiritual torment, she avoided those about her in a way that could not fail to attract wondering attention. She spent most of her time in solitude, sometimes in the woods, sometimes sitting in troubled thought upon the bank of a neighboring creek, and sometimes in such seclusion as she could find or make indoors. She seemed to shrink in pain from contact with others. She declined even the ministrations of the negro maid whose duty it was to care for her comfort. If she did not actively avoid association with Helen herself, her consent to it suggested reluctant submission rather than willingness, and, try as she might to maintain conversation with this closest of friends, she could not help laps-

ing frequently into silence and obvious inattention.

Helen observed all these things with keen distress. It would have troubled her sorely in any case to know that Irene was suffering; in this case it troubled her the more because she could imagine no external cause for it all. She knew that no letters had come for the girl and that she had seen nobody who might have borne tidings of a distressing character to her. Her trouble must, therefore, have had its origin within the house, or within herself. In either case Helen felt that some part at least of the fault must be her own; that she must in some way have failed in her sisterly guardianship. With that thought in her mind she decided at last to speak to Irene about the matter. Thus far she had kept silent in dread of seeming intrusive, and in the hope that the depression would prove to be a passing one, due to some physical cause, or to no cause at all, as such moods in imaginative young women often are. Now, however, she felt that she should no longer delay.

Irene herself gave the needed opportunity.

182 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

She had begun to realize that her troubled abstraction and lack of social responsiveness must be puzzling and perhaps painful to this dearest possible friend. "It's selfish at any rate," she said to herself, "and selfishness is the worst fault any human being can have, I think." So after duly chastising her spirit she set about reforming her conduct. One afternoon, when her impulse was to slip away unseen to the woodlands — for when she felt the need of close thinking this maid of the mountains instinctively sought the solitude of the out of doors rather than indoor seclusion — she suddenly bethought herself of her purpose, and said to Helen:

"Come with me, won't you, dear. I think I need you to-day to keep me healthy in my soul."

Helen eagerly responded to the invitation, and with arms about each other's waists the two hurried across the fields and made their way into the depths of the hickory woodlands, where they had often sat for hours watching the squirrels at play. They had a favorite haunt there, where there was moss to sit upon

and the trunk of a fallen tree for their backs to rest against.

During the walk there was no reference made by either of the young women to the subject that was uppermost in the minds of both. But when they were seated on the moss, nestling close together, Helen broke the silence.

"Thank you for saying that, Irene, and still more for feeling it."

"Saying that I need you? Is that what you mean? Why you know I always need you, Helen, and never so much as when I am in trouble."

"Yes, I know that, and for many days past I have known you were in trouble. But I had no right to intrude with questions."

Then abruptly changing the current of her utterance she said:

"Irene, if I were in trouble of any kind, I wouldn't wait for days and days before telling you about it. I love you too much for that."

"Yes, I know. It's because I've been trying to think the thing out, and oh, Helen, I can't!

There isn't any out to it. Besides, you never can have a trouble of the kind I've been struggling with."

"Why not?"

"Why, because you're not 'poor white trash,' and —"

"Hush, Irene. You know how it hurts me to hear you call yourself that. I told you you mustn't, and you promised, you know."

"Yes, I know. But that was before I realized the wretchedness — before I understood how much it means. It's different now, and I say the words in a different spirit. Helen, do you know I've grown years and years older, all of a sudden — within a few days? I don't feel as I did; I don't think as I did; I don't see things as I did, and they mean something quite different. I've grown suddenly older. I understand things I didn't understand before. I feel things painfully now, things that I never before thought of in any serious way, and the worst of it is that they thrust problems before me that I feel I must solve, but I can't. Oh, it's terrible and there is no way out, no remedy, no right thing to do, nothing that doesn't

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 185

make the matter worse instead of better. Even in bringing you out here and talking to you about it I'm making it worse; I'm forcing you to share a trouble that doesn't belong to you."

The girl was on the verge of hysteria. Helen's calm common sense came to the rescue.

"Listen to me, Irene," she said in a placid and very soothing tone. "You haven't told me yet what it is that troubles you, but whatever it is, you have made matters much worse by brooding over it in secret until you have become morbid. It would have been far better if you had told me all about it at the beginning. It is always better to do that. Otherwise it wouldn't be worth while to have friends who love you. Even if the case is as bad as you think, even if there is really no way out — though I don't believe that — I could have given you love and sympathy, and you wouldn't have grown morbid. If you care for my love and sympathy — if they really mean anything to you — you will tell me now. Tell me everything that is in your mind, and then we can talk it over together. You'll see things

186 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

differently when I am looking at them with you. Tell me, dear, and if a good cry will relieve you, we'll have one together and feel much better for it."

The suggestion, coming in the queer shape it did, and made with the tenderest sympathy of voice, brought a little laugh from Irene — hysterical in its character perhaps, for she was already crying — and it seemed somewhat to relieve her.

"I'll tell you presently," she said with some difficulty; "as soon as I can."

With that she yielded to Helen's caressing movement and let her head rest quietly on her companion's shoulder.

After a silence of several minutes she raised herself to an upright posture, and, in a voice that she seemed to control with difficulty, poured forth all that she had been thinking and feeling and suffering during the days of her silence. Many parts of it were difficult to put into words. There were emotions so subtle and elusive that it seemed impossible even to indicate them in that way, but Helen's tender sympathy quickened her understanding,

and Irene felt that she had "made her know" the things she could not fitly say.

As the recital went on, there came to the girl a very great lightening of the burden she bore. The fact that Helen now shared her thought and knew of her perplexity was comforting in an unexpected degree. It made the difficult things seem easier, the saddening ones less grievous.

Helen had an answer in her mind too, an answer that seemed to her convincing; but she refrained from offering it, lest, in her lack of precise information, she should err in her utterance and perhaps do harm rather than good. What she did say was this:

"I'm sorry you feel in that way, Irene, and I'm going to insist that you shall cheer up and look at matters in a clearer, truer light. I'm perfectly sure you are all wrong in what you think and feel on this subject, but you see I don't really know the facts that make you feel so. I know nothing of your people except that your father was a schoolmate of my father's and that he is a poor man with a large family. That is all my father has ever told us about

your people. I know he thinks a great deal of you — he is proud of you in fact, and nothing delights him more than to observe the way in which you are developing into a lovely womanhood. He has said that to me many times, and has congratulated me on my good fortune in having you for my sister. Surely you're not going to spoil all that by growing morbid and unhappy."

"But I can't help being troubled by all these riddles, Helen, and you see how true it is that I can't solve them."

"Listen, Irene. Do you believe in the sincere friendship and affection of my father and mother?"

"Why, of course. How could I help that? Aren't they doing everything they can for me? And don't they give me the love I need more than anything else?"

"Do you believe my father and my mother are wise people, people who know what is right and what is wrong?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"Then why don't you trust the love and the wisdom you believe in? Why not ask my

father and mother about all these things? You know they would not ask you to do anything wrong or selfish to save their lives or your own. Why not go to them and tell them all you've been thinking and feeling, and let them tell you what they think?"

The suggestion was one which had already occurred to Irene, but she had shrunk from it. She felt that these two had done and were doing so much for her that she ought not to ask them to share and bear the burdens that belonged to her alone. In answer to a suggestion of that sort, Helen was ready with a convincing reply:

"When we love anybody, Irene, as my father and mother have learned to love you, we want to share their burdens and soothe their griefs with sympathy and affection. Besides, do you think for a minute that they don't see how unhappy you have been of late? Do you imagine that to be a smaller affliction to them than it would be to tell them all about it? Do you think it is kind of you to withhold from them a confidence you give to me? Is it even just to them? Isn't it in fact a selfish

thing to do, just because you naturally shrink from speaking to older people about these things?"

"Let me think that out," said Irene, rising and walking farther into the woodlands alone, after her habit when she was perplexed. Helen was wise enough to reply only:

"Yes, think it out. I'll wait here for you."

It was perhaps half an hour before Irene rejoined her companion. When she did so she said simply:

"You're right, Helen. It is wrong and selfish and mean in me. Thank you for telling me. I'll do what you say. Let's go to the house now. I want to sleep a little. I haven't slept much lately, but I can sleep now."

XVII

HELEN'S plan of procedure proved to be effective — for the time being at least. Colonel Hargreaves listened to all that Irene had to say, and then questioned her a little.

“Suppose you had remained with your own people, Irene, could you have done them any good? Could you have done anything for the betterment of their condition?”

Irene was obliged to answer in the negative.

“Then, on the other hand, did your coming here and remaining here do them any harm, any wrong? Has it made their condition worse in any way?”

Again there was only the one answer, “No.”

“Can you imagine any reason for regretting what you have done? Do you think it was wrong or selfish in you to avail yourself of an opportunity to better yourself, to secure

the education and culture for which you so earnestly longed? Do you not see that human progress would stop if men and women should refuse to make the most they can of their abilities merely because others lack such abilities, or haven't the opportunity or the energy to take a like advantage?"

The girl's answer to that surprised him, and revealed a phase of her trouble which she had not shown before either to Helen or to him and Mrs. Hargreaves.

"As to all that I am convinced," she said, "and I was wrong to think otherwise. But —"

"But what, Irene?"

"Why there's something else."

"What is it?"

"Why I am a beggar, a pauper receiving alms, dependent upon you and Cousin Mary for the very clothes on my back and the food I eat. Worse still, I have not been ashamed of that until now — I didn't even think of it until a little while ago."

Both her auditors were shocked by this view and puzzled by it. It was a thought quite new

to them and exceedingly unwelcome. Among that class of Virginians to which they belonged the right of every woman, like that of every child, to be nurtured, protected and provided for by the men about her was a simple axiom of social existence. They regarded every woman as entitled to all this by virtue of her womanhood, and in their view it was the privilege of men, quite as much as their duty, to provide for all the womenkind who might need such provision. The idea that Irene was in any invidious sense a "dependent" seemed to them simply absurd. It was in contradiction of all the traditions, all the fixed ideas of their time and class, all the customs in which they had been bred throughout numberless generations. It was a shocking thought, and they refused even to treat it as one to be combated. It was as little open to argument as would have been the assertion that twice two is not four or that the half is more than the whole, or that the sun does not give light and heat. For reply, Colonel Hargreaves said:

"You are a member of my family, Irene — you became such at my urgent request —

194 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

and I do not regard the members of my family as dependents, or beggars or paupers, merely because they do not pay me in money for their — psha, Irene, you know better than that. If you ever say anything of the kind again, or think anything of the kind, your Cousin Mary and I will feel that you fix a price on our affection. You will wound us deeply if you ever again cherish such a thought as that.”

For reply, Irene, with tears trickling down her cheeks, but with a smile of radiant happiness illumining her countenance, rose and tenderly caressed them both, speaking only the words: “Forgive me!”

For a time no one of the three could speak at all, but each felt that speech was unnecessary when hearts so lovingly understood.

It was not until after Irene had withdrawn that the husband and wife discussed the matter. Then with masculine inability to understand a case so feminine, Colonel Hargreaves said:

“What on earth can have put all that nonsense into the girl’s head — she’s usually so sensible?”

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 195

"She's morbid, or getting to be so," replied the clearer seeing wife. "I blame myself for that. I think if you don't mind, Richard, we'll occupy the Executive Mansion this coming winter."

"Of course, if you wish it. But what has that to do with Irene's trouble?"

"It will cure it, that's all. She and Helen have had too much solitude during the last year. It was well enough at first, but they are older now. We'll entertain a good deal during the winter. Dress, pleasurable society, and contact with others will mend the whole trouble. It is only September now, and we can't begin a social campaign for three months yet. But I shall have Helen fill the house here with company after this — girls of her own age and young men —"

"If she brings the girls," he laughingly answered, "she won't have to bother about the young men. They'll come without the asking, for really Irene is a very beautiful girl."

"Have you just discovered that? She is radiantly beautiful, or will be when she's taking a proper part in social life, but she is

196 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

something better than that. She is charming, quite apart from her beauty. I'll give a dining day once or twice every week till it's time for us to go to Richmond."

"Mary, you are really a wonderful woman. I never should have thought of all these things but for you. Do you know my own thought was that Irene needed calomel or quinine or something of that sort. Of course you're right. But won't so much entertaining tax you overmuch?"

"I'll make the girls pay the tax for themselves," was the wise woman's reply.

XVIII

IT was not long before Christmas, when the first of Governor Hargreaves's social functions was held in the Executive Mansion. Three months of the less formal but very active social life at Redrock had given to Helen and Irene an ease and self possession which now served them well. Helen's temperament, indeed, needed little use or instruction in that way, but Irene was by nature shy, and her shyness was at first made more pronounced by a lingering sense of her inferiority to her surroundings. She still felt herself out of her proper place, and it needed the three months of dining days and the like to use her to new conditions and conquer her painful self-consciousness.

In this training Tom Hardaway was her most efficient teacher. Tom was always at his

198 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ease, for one thing, and his example counted for much. Better still was his jaunty indifference to formalities, and his half serious, half laughing philosophy, which refused to believe that anything was of great consequence — anything but truth and manliness and human sympathy. That philosophy proved contagious in Irene's case, the more so because Tom was much at Redrock at that time, and because he quickly formed the habit of singling out Irene and devoting himself mainly to her.

All this in quite a friendly, brotherly way, that could not have alarmed even a much shyer young woman than Irene was. If Tom had felt it necessary to formulate the reasons for his preference of her, his thought would have run somewhat in this wise: "She's an awfully nice girl — as pretty as a picture; she's bright enough to understand everything one says to her, and to respond in like spirit; she has brains in plenty and mighty good brains at that; her voice is singularly low and sweet — contralto I suppose people would call it who are learned in musical nomenclature — so that it is a delight just to listen as she says the

simplest things. Then she is so utterly honest, and that goes a great way."

In fact Tom did not formulate his reasons at all. It was not his habit to render an account of himself to himself or to anybody else. He was a close intimate of the family at Red-rock, and it could never occur to him that he need give any reason or have any reason for doing what he liked there. It had been his practice from childhood to do that, and if he now liked to talk with Irene, walk with her, ride with her in the early mornings of the superb autumnal days, what possible reason could there be for excusing or accounting for his good taste in choosing a companion?

In the meantime he was quite unconsciously directing her reading. He would have resented a suggestion to that effect, for he held in scorn all reading of the kind which in our later time might be called "personally conducted." But he and she talked much of books, and Tom was a young man apt to hold pronounced opinions and to utter them. His tastes in literature appealed strongly to her, and his judgments carried weight, though if

her own were different she did not hesitate to say so, or to justify her own opinion.

One day she did this in a tone which immediately afterwards seemed to her too arrogant, too aggressively opinionated. Instantly she apologized, saying with a little laugh:

"What a typical old maid I'll make of myself some day if I go on asserting myself like that. Pardon me, I oughtn't to have done it. Your opinion of course should be final with a mere girl like me."

"No, it oughtn't," Tom broke in vehemently, "and I'll quarrel with you if you talk in that way. You've no right to submit your judgment or your taste to anybody's else. That is a mental attitude fit only for a slave or a time-serving courtier. It doesn't become you. I know the great majority of people do that, but that's only because the great majority haven't any brains or lack the courage to think for themselves. *You* have no right to cripple your intellect in that way."

She wondered why he said that. Why he laid so much stress upon the personal pronoun, in what way her case differed from that of

others, but she dared not ask lest her question should call forth some reply of a too complimentary character. For when Tom Hardaway answered a question at all he was apt to answer it with perfect candor, whether the truth spoken was likely to be agreeable or the reverse. She turned the conversation into another channel therefore, and soon others in the house joined them. The interruption came most inopportunely, Tom thought, for just at the moment they were discussing Bailey's "Festus," and Irene was saying something that Tom wanted to hear, about the daring with which the poet handled sacred things, and the literary courage he showed in the employment of what she called "a shockingly commonplace diction" in the midst of some of his loftiest passages. Tom wanted to hear her out, and perhaps he wanted to combat her views or to set forth his own, about Bailey and Alexander Smith, who were somehow associated in his mind, in spite of the utter unlikeness of their work.

He was annoyed at the interruption, therefore, and by way of punishing the young

women who had caused it, he lapsed from his usual originality and sparkle of conversation into the most commonplace and prosaic talk he could command.

If anybody had suggested to Tom Hardaway that he was falling in love with Irene, he would have laughed at the idea or have angrily repudiated it, according to the status of the accuser and his own momentary condition of mind. In fact nobody ventured to suggest such a thing, and as for Tom himself the thought had never entered his mind. Nevertheless — there is never any certainty about such things, and at any rate Tom Hardaway enjoyed Irene's society more than that of any other person whatever.

When the time came for the first of Governor Hargreaves's balls, Tom went to Richmond some days in advance, and after much picking and choosing seriously depleted the stock of the most fashionable florist in the city. It is true that he sent a fair share of his flowers to Helen also, choosing for each the color best fit to make the most of her complexion, and thus showing no preference for

either. But it is also true that when he visited the florist's and during all the time he remained there it was of Irene chiefly that he was thinking.

He was somewhat late in arriving at the ball, partly because of ordinary delays and partly perhaps because the vest he was to wear on that occasion failed to please him in its fit or its whiteness or its style, and he was under the necessity of suspending the work of dressing until his servant could provide him with another.

Ordinarily Tom Hardaway was careless in such matters, and his fastidiousness on this occasion excused itself to his mind upon the obvious plea that this was a special function, and that a due respect for the Governor of the Commonwealth required a closer attention to dress than he was accustomed to bestow upon it.

When he entered and made his way to his hostess, he found Helen and Irene there helping her receive. Both were wearing his flowers, and Irene playfully reproached him with being a monopolist. His reply was instant and to the girl startling.

204 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"How could I help it? I couldn't send you flowers without sending some to Helen also."

Irene flushed, but answered promptly:

"Why didn't you put that the other way?"

"Because then it wouldn't have been what I meant," he answered, falling back to let other guests make their greetings.

Irene was more than a little disconcerted. She was becoming well used to receive compliments with composure, and the more pointed and extravagant they were, the more lightly she turned them aside as meaningless. But nothing like this had ever happened to her before, and she did not know what to think of it. She knew Tom's candor too well to believe that he had frivolously indulged in mere compliment, and yet the words he had spoken so seriously suggested something that she could not and would not believe. It was her most cherished imagining that in his peculiar fashion Tom was in love with Helen — not madly perhaps, but sincerely — and that after awhile he would tell her so. It all seemed so wise and reasonable and accordant with the fitness of things.

Without permitting herself to think he had intended what his words seemed to imply with respect to his attitude toward herself, she felt that at any rate they negated the hope she had cherished with regard to him and Helen; and the thought troubled her.

There was no time in which to brood over the matter, however, even if her intoxication with the brilliancy of everything about her had been less pronounced than it was; for the work of receiving the guests was over now and the dancing was about to begin.

As the wearer of his colors, she gave Tom the first dance, and Jack Towns — who still greatly admired her beauty, though he had fallen in love with half a dozen other young women since the barbecue — claimed the second. After that her card filled up so rapidly and so completely that poor Tom could secure no other dance with her. After leading Helen out for a quadrille, he asked for no favor at the hands of any other young woman. He did not care to dance, he said, and under the circumstances perhaps that was true.

But as the whirl went on he had time to

206 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

think, and his thinking was not altogether satisfactory. He remembered what he had said to Irene, and he wondered why he had said it. "Am I in love with her?" he asked himself a score of times with no satisfactory result. If so, why had he not discovered the fact before? The question puzzled him.

Strangely enough he found himself frightened for the first time in his life. He wondered what Irene would think of what he had said. Would she be angry, or shocked, or distressed? And in what frame of mind would she meet him on the morrow? Would he dare meet her at all? Could he not invent some occasion for leaving the city that night and perhaps remaining away long enough to "let the thing blow over?"

That last question suggested another: Did he really want the thing to blow over? If he should now run away, "like a coward," he added, would he not quickly find himself impelled to come back again?

He managed to pull his wits together sufficiently to do his part when refreshments were announced, but as soon as that part of the



function was over he slipped away to his hotel where he passed the small hours of the night in resolving to dismiss the matter from his mind — and not doing it.

With the earliest dawn he mounted his horse and rode away at a gait that only a powerful animal, carrying his hundred and sixty pounds' weight, could have stood. He succeeded in that way in tiring out himself as well as his steed.

XIX

THE daylight has a way of changing the aspect of things — especially things imaginative and emotional. The mind is soberer when the sun shines than when the lights glitter, and the judgment is more masterful then than in the darkness of a sleepless chamber.

When Tom Hardaway had breakfasted after his long ride, the incident which had so troubled his mind during the night, seemed of far smaller consequence than it had done before. After all what had he said or done that need trouble anybody. He had paid Irene a very marked compliment, but so doubtless had all the other young men whose names had crowded her dancing card.

Still there was a difference. It was his habit to be perfectly honest with himself, and he could not blink the fact that his compliment

had probably meant far more — at least to himself — than those of the others had. It had been prompted by a feeling strange and new to him, a feeling of the existence of which he had never been conscious until the moment of utterance.

He wondered what that feeling had been, and what had brought it into being, and what it meant.

It revealed to him the fact that his attitude of mind toward Irene was changed, but "what of that?" he asked.

"She was a schoolgirl before; she's a grown woman now, and a very lovely one. Of course one doesn't regard such a woman as he has regarded the girl of an earlier period."

The thought that perhaps he had fallen in love with Irene suggested itself, but he promptly dismissed it as utterly absurd. He had never been in the habit of falling in love. He had always laughed at Jack Towns for his propensity to do that. No, of course he was not in love, and the only thing for him to do was to ignore the fact that in the excitement that pervades a ballroom he had been perhaps

210 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

a trifle too pointed in complimenting a young woman whom he had long known intimately, and whom he certainly admired very much.

Nevertheless he heartily wished that social custom did not oblige him to call upon her that afternoon, and when he did so, he was conscious of an embarrassment such as he had never felt before.

To his relief he found others there, callers upon Helen and Irene, and he was still more relieved when Irene met him with her usual cordiality of manner and quite as if there had been no incident between them important enough to recall.

"Thank heaven," he reflected, "she has forgotten all about the thing — or perhaps she didn't even notice it."

In that he was mistaken. Women are more secretive of their finer feelings than men are. They are more adept in disguise and concealment, and their self-control is far greater. Indeed that is their only safeguard against humiliating embarrassment — the defensive armor that saves their pride from destructive wounds.

During all those hours of dancing that had followed Tom's withdrawal from the scene, Irene had remembered what he had said to her, and it had troubled her not a little. She too had wondered over it, and over her own state of feeling with regard to it. But as a woman she knew how to bear herself upon meeting him again. She knew, as no man ever can know, how to hide feeling behind an impenetrable mask of ordinary seeming.

"Oh, I'm right glad to see you," she chattered, "and you don't look half as tired as I feel after it all. But then you danced so little; I danced every set, you know, though sometimes I did wish the gentleman would prefer sitting one out. And besides of course you're used to such things and they don't excite you, while with me it was all so new and so bright and joyous that it kept me in a quiver of delight. It was my very first ball you know."

Tom was relieved. "She has forgotten the whole matter," he thought; "and no wonder. Of course she was bombarded with compliments more pointed than mine, by every addle-

pated popinjay who managed to get his name on her dancing card."

Tom Hardaway was ordinarily a just and even a generous man in all his thoughts of his fellow men. Just why he should now stigmatize as "addle-pated popinjays" all the young men who had shown their good sense by appreciating Irene's charms of person and conversation, it would have puzzled him to say.

He was satisfied that she had completely forgotten his own words, so that there was nothing further for him to worry himself about, but somehow he was not altogether pleased with that conviction. It was reassuring but by no means flattering. He had no time to think about the matter, however, for Irene chattered on during the whole time that convention allotted to a call, and as others were coming and going all the while the interruptions were frequent.

Just as Tom was taking his leave, a young man of impressive appearance entered, a man who seemed surrounded with a nimbus of personal consequence. Tom observed that he was

strikingly handsome for one thing, tall, well-formed, strong-limbed, with a shapely head that he carried as if he valued it, and with strong, well-formed features.

"Oh, wait one moment," Irene said to Tom, laying her hand detainingly upon his arm. "I want you to meet Mr. Stanley — the representative of my old home district in the Legislature. He was extremely polite to me at the ball."

"Surely," said Stanley, replying to the young woman while carelessly offering three fingers for Tom to shake, and otherwise ignoring him, except for a casual glance, "surely nobody could have been otherwise than polite to so charming a young lady. I was enraptured with your beauty and grace, Miss McGrath, and I've been quarrelling for an hour with a florist for having no flowers worthy of your acceptance. These," offering a huge bouquet, "are the best he could furnish. They will be worthier, if you lend them the grace of your acceptance."

Ignoring the proffered three fingers, Tom turned away, saying by way of leave-taking:

214 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"Good-bye, Irene. I'll see you at Redrock. Helen tells me you and she are going to drive out there to-morrow to rest yourselves. Good-bye."

Stanley bowed a trifle by way of good-bye to the young man. Then he turned to Irene and said:

"Surely you are not going to leave Richmond for long, Miss McGrath? We simply cannot spare you."

"We shall spend the Christmas holidays at Redrock," she replied simply. "Colonel Hargreaves wouldn't think it was Christmas anywhere else. By the way, have you ever read Dickens's 'Christmas Carol'?"

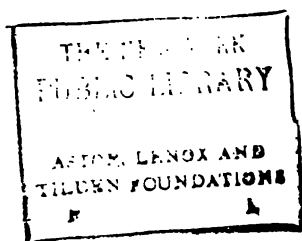
Stanley, who rarely read anything except the newspapers and his law books, replied:

"That pleasure is yet in store for me. I'll get the book to-day—in deference to your recommendation."

The man's manner grated on Irene's sensibilities, and she could not say why. She therefore censured herself for the fact and resolved to cultivate a more generous appreciation. "For surely," she thought, "Mr. Stanley is a



"THEY WILL BE WORTHIER, IF YOU LEND THEM THE GRACE OF
YOUR ACCEPTANCE,"—Page 213.



charming man, — if only he were a little less complimentary, and if — I don't know what. At any rate everybody else seems to find him a most agreeable person and of course I ought to. I'll try."

Stanley was in fact very popular, especially with women. His handsome face and person were in his favor, but they were by no means all there was about him to make people like him and admire him. Without being in any sense an able man he had a certain alertness of intellect which impressed those about him favorably. He was somewhat gifted in conversation; he had heard and remembered a multitude of anecdotes and stories, and he told them well by way of illustrating what he had to say. He valued himself highly, and upon slight acquaintance men and women are apt to take one at his self valuation.

Stanley was a braggart and a bully by native disposition, but he had managed to reduce the manifestation of those impulses to a certain air of consequence, a subdued self-assertion which women and new acquaintances found pleasing in a man so companionable, but which

216 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

men who knew him better were apt to call "infernal insolence."

On this occasion he made his call even briefer than custom required it to be, and after a few genially gracious words addressed to Helen and Irene, he made his bow with a sweep that seemed to include such others as were in the drawing room at the time.

He had decided to be an invited guest at Redrock for the holidays, and he felt that he had no time to spare from the effort he must make to secure the invitation.

It had been his purpose to return to his home county for the Christmas season. It was his custom to cultivate political favor and law practice by entertaining his constituents in half barbaric fashion at that season. The Legislature would not be in session until the beginning of the new year, and he had gone to Richmond only to attend the Governor's ball, meaning to return to his constituents immediately afterwards. But now that he had met Irene McGrath, his plans were changed. If he could secure an invitation to Redrock for the holidays, his constituents might go hang. Or

rather, as he thought the matter out with a shrewd subtlety that often served him well, by becoming the invited guest of the Governor, he would impress his own importance upon his constituents far more strongly than he could do by playing host to them at home. Then again there was the future to think of. Hitherto he had feared to marry lest he should impair his chances of political preferment, the one profound passion of his rather shallow nature. For should he marry an ignorant, underbred daughter of the mountains, she could not fail to be a very millstone about his neck, while if he should seek a bride among the high-bred daughters of the planters, his choice was sure to offend the mountaineers who constituted the majority of his present constituents, and who, even if he should seek higher office in a wider region, would still be a factor of importance in the problem of his ambition.

But in Irene he saw an opportunity. If he could win her, as he had little doubt that he could, he would have a wife whose grace, beauty, and most agreeable presence would open every social door to him, while her moun-

tain origin and the fact that her own people remained simple mountaineers would placate prejudice in that quarter, and please Judy Peters. Indeed, he thought, if he, their representative, should make her his wife, the mountaineers would cherish her with pride, as an example of what fine women the mountains could bring forth, and go on voting for him as a man who didn't think the best was always to be found among the "stuck up" planter people.

As for his success in winning Irene, he entertained no annoying doubts. If he could secure an invitation to pass the holiday season at Redrock, his confidence in his own attractiveness of person, manner and political position did not permit him to doubt the outcome.

He encountered far less difficulty in securing the desired invitation than he had anticipated. Indeed the invitation came to him so easily that it warmed his self esteem into a glow of delight. He went to Hargreaves upon pretence of wishing to consult him about his cherished plans for improving the schools in

the mountains, and otherwise giving to the poor folk there a better outlook upon life.

"What you said upon that head in your speeches during last year's campaign," he pompously explained, "first attracted my attention to the subject and awakened in me some appreciation of its importance. I was not in the Legislature last year, as you know, but now that I am there I want to support you in that work, and to do so effectively, I must do so intelligently. Hence my call. I am very anxious to hear from your own lips what your ideas are, and to learn the best means of carrying them out. Could you find time to inform me?"

Governor Hargreaves was profoundly interested in this plan for the uplifting of the mountaineers, and the indifference shown by the Legislature during the first year of his term had sorely disappointed him. He welcomed Stanley's offer of help therefore eagerly. Here was a young, ambitious legislator, who seemed to be a man of energy and capacity, ready to go into the matter with enthusiasm. It was an opportunity not to be slighted.

"I am delighted with what you tell me of your interest in the cause," he said, "and of course I shall be more than glad to put you in possession of all the information I have collected. But I'm more than busy here, and shall be during the few days that remain before Christmas. But why can't you come to Red-rock for the holidays? We'll all be glad to have you, and you're unattached, I believe."

Stanley had to exercise some care not to betray too great an eagerness in accepting.

"I had planned some other things," he said, hesitatingly as if in doubt, "but I suppose I can put them aside. Yes, I can arrange my affairs so as to allow me the honor and pleasure of being your guest. Thank you, I accept, gladly."

XX

IN the old time in Virginia, "Christmas" was a period of exuberant jollity for both whites and blacks, and it endured for the space of a fortnight.

During that period the negroes were required to do none but absolutely necessary work, and they were privileged to be as saucily familiar with the "white folks" as they pleased.

In anticipation of the festival season, great mountains of wood were cut and loosely piled up, so that Christmas fires might roar in every chimney without entailing upon anybody the necessity of chopping. All plantation work that could be done in advance was done, so that the days and nights of the negroes might be as freely devoted to enjoyment as were those of their masters. The "great house" was not more joyously given up to merriment

than were the cabins in the quarters. The negroes were lavishly provided with the dainties they most dearly liked — fresh beef, mutton and fat shoats, with still more welcome poultry — and all that generous masters imbued with the Christmas spirit could do to make the season a joyous one to their dependents was done with a hearty good will.

On Christmas morning it was the privilege of the negroes to awaken the household by firing "Christmas logs" at the earliest dawn and laughing as uproariously as they pleased at the shock they imagined their salutes had produced. A Christmas log was a log with deep auger holes bored in it. These holes were filled with gunpowder, and carefully plugged up. When a log was fired it was blown into fragments with a detonation scarcely inferior in force to that of a siege gun.

After this noisy announcement of breaking day, it was the practice of the house-servants to enter the bedrooms, bearing to favored young masters and mistresses pitchers of sparkling persimmon beer, with cakes and the like, all of which they had prepared in pro-



foundest secrecy, as agreeable surprises to their recipients.

They had great sport too, in "catching" the white folk with the first Christmas greeting, which always took the form of "Christmas Gif', Mas. Henry," or "Christmas Gif', Mis' Lucy," instead of the politer "Merry Christmas."


As a rule they got the gifts thus asked for in forms adapted to the varying tastes and needs of the claimants. Flaming red or golden yellow bandannas to be used as turbans delighted the women, while more masculine presents and a drink of spirits all round set the men and boys grinning with delight, and filled all the precincts with jollity, joy and good will.

The plantation house was apt to be full of guests throughout the festive season, some of them staying in the house, others coming and going and all bent upon getting and giving as much of enjoyment as possible.

In the early morning of Christmas day a bowl of egg-nog was carefully compounded and relishfully consumed. Every meal was an informal feast. There were horseback rides,

games, hare hunts and sometimes more serious sport to fill up the daylight hours, with not a little love making as an incident, and in the evenings the young people danced. while their elders found a generous satisfaction in heated discussions of politics and religion — always a favorite indulgence in that time and country.

In the matter of dressing, the Virginians generally led the "simple life." There were no formal requirements on that point among them. Every man dressed as he pleased, and every young woman wore the garments she thought most becoming to her, neither men nor women paying the least heed to the time of day or evening as a thing that should have influence in the matter. Young men who happened to own what we now call "evening coats," but which were then usually denominated "sparrowtails" were quite as apt to appear in them at breakfast or at church as at any other time or place. Young men of dandyish proclivities were fond of wearing very low cut shoes with silver buckles or silken ties, over white socks with silk clocks, but there was no special time of day for the donning of these



fopperies, and the young men who wore them at all were conspicuously few. Most of the sturdy fellows wore top boots into which they stuffed the legs of their trousers when they were about to ride horseback.

For the rest, whatever the occasion might be in that free and easy society — except of course at weddings or large, formal balls — the man in a rough riding coat and high boots was as well dressed as anybody. The Virginians were impatient of conventional restraints and they neither made rules for themselves nor submitted themselves to any. They were punctilious in their observance of those niceties of conduct which they held to make and mark the distinction between a gentleman and one without the pale; but in matters indifferent they insisted upon perfect liberty for themselves and freely recognized the right of others to enjoy a like liberty.

“In Virginia,” once explained a very distinguished Virginian of the old school, “in Virginia you mustn’t call a man a liar or treat a woman with discourtesy; but beyond that you may do as you like.”

226 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

It was a Christmas of this kind that Stanley was to enjoy at Redrock. He arrived on Christmas eve a little while before supper and was at once recognized as an unusually welcome addition to the list of those who were to remain during the fortnight. Before the evening was over he had still further impressed all the company by his easy self possession, his versatile ability to bear his share in every conversation, whatever its subject might be, his readiness to join in the dance or to lend a good bass voice to the singing. In short Stanley knew the whole art of making himself agreeable, and he had come to Redrock fully determined to practise that art ceaselessly. If his ready cordiality had a touch of what in another might have been called insolent familiarity in it, the fact was rather pleasing than otherwise, especially to feminine appreciation. If his words or tone sometimes suggested a self-assertiveness greater than is common among gentlemen, the answer in every mind was that after all a man so obviously superior could hardly be blamed for being in some degree conscious of the fact.

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 227

Even Tom Hardaway found himself forgetting the incident of the three fingers, and learning to like the man, for Tom had not yet discovered any reason for being jealous of him. In the first place Stanley did not at first manifest any special inclination to single out Irene for his attentions, and secondly Tom was by this time convinced that he was not himself in love with Irene. There was therefore not the smallest occasion or excuse for jealousy.

As the days and nights of merrymaking went on, the favor in which Stanley was held among the women increased, while the cordiality of the men toward him suffered some slight but noticeable diminution. He had a way of brushing them aside in conversation, which wounded their self esteem. He set forth his opinions in a tone of authority which annoyed even Colonel Hargreaves, who was anxious to be gracious.

There was nothing in all this that anybody could actively resent. It would have been impossible to quarrel with a man so good-humored, and quite absurd to utter a complaint of him for offences so subtly undefined and

228 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

elusive as to defy formulation. Nobody did complain in fact. Nobody mentioned the matter to anybody else, and nobody manifested resentment or reserve in his presence. It was only that every man in the company felt some shadowy sense of annoyance and irritation with him.

It is probable that Stanley knew this, and it is certain that he cared little for it. He was at Redrock for a single purpose, and if he could accomplish that he cared not at all for any other consequence.

After a little while circumstances and Irene seemed to lend themselves to his purpose. He discussed with the Governor the subject of education in the high mountains and the uplifting of the poorer people there, and Irene was always a listener so deeply interested that Stanley and she presently fell into the habit of continuing the discussions after other affairs had claimed Colonel Hargreaves's attention.

Stanley really knew very little about the subject, but a circumstance of that kind never restrained him from talking about any matter,

nor had he the kind of modesty which might have confessed a lack of information when an assumption of profound knowledge seemed to him advantageous. Bent upon ingratiating himself with the Governor, he accepted that gentleman's views and adopted his facts and figures, making them seem his own by the easy device of setting them forth in a somewhat different fashion.

He was possessed of a certain superficial readiness which made it easy for him thus to pose as master of subjects of which in fact he knew next to nothing.

He was especially facile in exposition, and Irene was full of admiration for his mastery of the historical facts involved when he repeated to her, as altogether his own, an explanation which Governor Hargreaves had given him only the evening before.

"You see, Miss McGrath, in order to understand present conditions among any people, we must consider the origin and previous history of that people, and especially the external circumstances that have given birth to present conditions."

230 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Irene nodded assent, but did not interrupt. She eagerly wanted to hear more.

"Now," Stanley continued, "a clear appreciation of the historical facts concerning the people whose case we are considering renders present conditions altogether simple — the necessary and inevitable result of efficient causes in the past."

"Tell me about it, please," said Irene fearing that he meant to rest content with what he had said. "I am very ignorant, you know."

"Not at all. Not more so certainly than I have found most other people to be with respect to this and kindred matters. They require a minuter knowledge of the history of our country than most men — even highly educated men — usually possess. The only difference is that you feel an intelligent interest in learning, while most persons are calmly content to remain ignorant."

A graceful bow accompanied this flattering speech, as if to emphasize it.

"Let me explain. The histories of our country — those of them at least which are

accessible to persons generally — give us very full accounts of the first great settlements in America, but they say little, and that little vaguely, about what I may call the secondary migrations. By that I mean those silent movements of population from one part of the country to another, which did not take the form of organized settlements or formal colony planting.

“The subject is too large for me to go into the details of it in a brief conversation like this, but I may sufficiently indicate the main facts that relate to the matter in which you and I are so deeply interested.

“Long before the original colonies were full, various discontents arose in them which resulted in large individual migrations. We are concerned now with only two of these. One of these was the movement of discontented Germans into Pennsylvania and southward through the fertile valleys of Virginia, where they have ever since been mistakenly called ‘Pennsylvania Dutch.’ They were a thrifty people, taciturn and stolid in manner, but quick to see and seize opportunities and tenacious in

232 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

their grasp. They appropriated to themselves all the rich valleys, leaving only the comparatively barren, rocky mountain steeps to the poorer, more generous and far less prudent Irish immigrants who migrated to those regions about the same time.

"It is from those Irish migrants that the poorer people of the high mountains are descended. They were a brave, hardy, optimistic race, easily contented with little and far too generous ever to become thrifty after the fashion of their German neighbors. From the first their poverty and the remoteness of the regions in which they lived made education among them difficult.

"If I have made myself clear, my dear Miss McGrath, you now understand the terms of the problem with which Governor Hargreaves and I are endeavoring to deal. It is a very difficult problem, rendered all the more difficult by the general indifference of the people concerned, but neither Governor Hargreaves nor I despair of finding a solution."

Irene thought it very modest and generous in Stanley thus to put Governor Hargreaves

first in consideration. Perhaps he intended her to think something of the sort. At all events, her interest in the matter prompted her to embrace every opportunity of talking with Stanley about it, until the frequency of their consultations, the interest both showed in them, and their partial withdrawal from the society of others in the house began to attract attention. There were whisperings and gigglings among the less serious young women and smilings among the young men, which somewhat troubled the devoted Helen, though she knew of no reason why they should, except that in an unwilling, subconscious way, she had herself come to dislike Stanley. Perhaps that is too strong a way of putting it; she no longer liked or admired him as much as she had done at first. "He doesn't wear well," she thought, "and yet there is nothing about him that I ought to dislike. I reckon I'm unreasonable, and maybe I'm right impertinent in thinking about it at all. Mr. Stanley is a young man whom any girl might like, I reckon, and Irene is a girl any man would find it hard not to fall in love with, I should think. If they are com-

234 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ing to care for each other it is certainly none of my business."

Tom Hardaway was far less modest in his judgment of what was and what was not his business. Tom was angry and disgusted. His opinion of Stanley would have been condensed into the term "cad," if that English slang word had then been known to him. As it was, he said to Helen:

"The fellow is insufferably insolent. His presumption is unbearable. I shall quarrel with him if this thing goes on."

"About what, Tom?" asked Helen with mischievous intent to tease him by compelling him to define his attitude. "About what, Tom?"

"Oh, anything will do to base a quarrel upon if one has made up his mind to have a thing out in that way."

"Yes, of course. But why should you wish to quarrel with Mr. Stanley? What is your grievance?"

"Why you must see that he's insufferably conceited and arrogant."

"Perhaps, but what of that? It is usually

enough to let such people alone. You must have some more active grievance than that. What is it, Tom?"

"Why, the way he annoys Irene with his attentions, and —"

"They do not seem to annoy her. She seems rather to like to walk and talk and ride with him."

"Yes, hang it, and that's the worst of it. He has bewitched her."

"Only as Othello bewitched Desdemona, I reckon."

She waited a while for Tom's reply, but he made none. Then she asked:

"Are you in love with Irene, Tom?"

There was no suggestion of playfulness in her tone. Rather it was anxious and troubled.

"No, of course not. At least I think I'm not, but —"

Helen suddenly remembered something that called her to her room. An hour later she pleaded a headache and asked to be excused from dinner. When Irene went to her in tender sympathy, Helen bade her go back to the guests, insisting that she herself needed no at-

236 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

tention of any kind. At supper she appeared, and with some apparent effort she bore her part then and afterwards, in the social proceedings. But Irene saw that a shadow of some kind had fallen upon the spirit of her friend — a shadow that did not lift or pass away. She saw too that the trouble was one to which she was not privileged to refer in her intercourse with Helen. But she learned from the increased tenderness of Helen's affection for her, that there was at least no trace of animosity toward herself in her friend's mind.

When at last the Christmas season was over and the house guests gone, these two sat together before a dying fire late one night, communing rather in silence than with speech. After a while Helen broke the silence:

"I'm going to be happy now, Irene. I've thought out all my problems, and made up my mind. I'm going to be an old maid. Hush, don't discuss the matter. It is all settled, and it's for the best in every way. Tell me something instead. Did Mr. Stanley address you while he was here?"

"Yes, and it surprised me greatly. I don't like his way of saying and doing things, Helen, and in this case it was almost offensive. He seemed to be condescending, and he seemed to know it. It was as if he thought I could give none but a favorable answer to the addresses of a man so vastly superior to myself. Helen, I reckon I should detest that man if it weren't for the efforts he is making in behalf of — well of my kind of people. I'm bound to be grateful to him for that, I reckon."

As she finished, Helen caressed her in a way that suggested a rather startling thought to her mind.

"Helen is relieved to hear of my rejection of Mr. Stanley's suit — more relieved than I ever saw her before. Can it be possible that he has made an impression upon her — that she loves him, and that her trouble arose from fear that I had accepted him?"

The thought was encouraged by what Helen said and did. She rose and called for their maid, and while waiting for her to appear, she again caressed Irene, saying:

"We must be happy now, very, very happy.

238 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

You see when I become an old maid I mustn't be a cross, cantankerous one."

No thought of Tom Hardaway as a possible factor in the matter entered Irene's head. How should it? She had not heard the conversation between those two



XXI


TOM HARDAWAY spoke with entire sincerity when he told Helen that he was not in love with Irene, and then corrected the statement into one of uncertainty. He really "did not think" he was in love with Irene. It was contrary to all his habits to fall in love. It was in violation of his most cherished life purposes. It was, therefore, on its face unlikely that he had done anything of the kind. Upon reflection, he felt quite sure of himself, and so far as he could he jauntily dismissed the subject from his mind. He enjoyed Irene's society; why should he let any foolishness of that sort deprive him of it? He liked to talk with a young woman whose intellectual response was so ready, and whose capacity to interest herself — and him — in so great a variety of subjects was unusual. Why, then

240 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

should he not continue to pass the greater part of his leisure in her society?

In aid of that he not only continued to visit Redrock at all hours, but went out of his way to plan little horseback excursions for himself, Helen and Irene, which should end in "snack" at his own house, Osmore, and a delightful afternoon for all three, browsing among his books, and talking of whatever interested them.

If he was uncertain or deceived as to his own state of mind, Helen Hargreaves was not. His reply to her question on the subject had revealed the whole matter to her, and, as we have seen, she had bravely borne the disappointment the revelation brought upon her. So bravely was she bearing it, and so unselfishly, that she gave willing and seemingly joyous aid to the courting which she knew — though neither of the others did — that all these rides and all these intimate talks of books and life amounted to. Helen had made up her mind to a supreme self sacrifice, and she was resolved that the sacrifice should be a cheerful and willing one. Her pride of race and womanhood aided her so well that neither



Tom nor Irene ever for a moment doubted that she was enjoying it all intensely.


As for Irene, she did not permit herself to think of Tom Hardaway's attentions otherwise than as he had persuaded himself to think of them. After the night of the ball she had felt some fear, for a time at least, that what he had said to her might prove to be but a prelude to more earnest courtship, but as the weeks went by with no such result she let the fear fade out of her mind, and was glad when it was gone. For Irene sincerely wished that her imaginings with regard to Tom and Helen might be fulfilled. As she repeatedly formulated that wish in her mind, and actively did all she could to bring about its fulfilment, she was half conscious, now and then, of a little heart-ache on her own account, but she resolutely repressed it. Tom had not asked for her love, and of course womanly modesty forbade her to give it unasked. Therefore she was absolutely certain that she did not love Tom. Besides, even if he had asked her, or even if he should do so now, she was quite certain that she must gently but firmly refuse. She was "poor white

trash," and she thought too highly of Tom Hardaway to let him throw himself away for love of her. Finally she was insistent in her conviction that Tom and Helen were "made for each other," and now that Tom so ceaselessly sought the company of the pair, she had every reason to believe that he was finding out for himself how desirable it was for him to fulfil the destiny she had marked out for him.

Thus matters drifted on day after day and week after week as the winter waned, with no one of these three quite knowing whither they were drifting or very greatly caring.

Then came an interruption. During the winter the two girls several times went to Richmond to take part in social functions, remaining there sometimes for a week or more, sometimes for only a few days. On these occasions Stanley took pains to see as much as he could of Irene and to impress her, as much as possible, with the desirability of the alliance he was offering her.

He had not taken her first rejection of his suit at all seriously. It was not unusual, he



reflected, for a young woman to say "No" at first, with full intent to say "Yes" at the next opportunity. "Women are like legislative bodies," he said; "it is their privilege to 'reconsider' their decisions."

Apart from that, Stanley could not believe that any young woman in Irene's position could seriously mean to refuse a proposal of marriage from him. To have believed that would have been to undervalue himself in a way to which he was altogether unused.

"I must wait a little while," he resolved, "and then speak to her again. It's annoying to wait of course, but a little wilfulness on the part of a girl is by no means unbecoming, and there is time enough between now and the end of the session in which to dispose of the matter satisfactorily. I needn't hurry. Delay on my part may serve to warn her of what she is risking, and if I'm not mistaken, she has enough prudence to avoid risks of that sort."

He complacently waited, therefore, for a time, but meanwhile sparing no effort to strengthen the favorable impression which he doubted not he had made upon her.

He talked much with her about the great scheme of uplifting for the mountaineers, and he made many speeches about it in the Legislature — flowery, rhetorical outbursts which, whether they won support for his measures or not, served to advertise him in ways that he desired.

But the more Irene listened to his speeches, and the more he talked with her about the subject, the more doubtfully she regarded both himself and his measures. He seemed to her insincere, for one thing, and for another he seemed unable to explain to her how he expected the measures he advocated to accomplish their professed purposes. She was a clear headed person, with a chronic desire for definite understanding. Vague generalities did not satisfy her mind, even when they were set forth in glittering phrases that might mean a great deal if only one could understand them.

One day she precipitated a crisis by her candor. Stanley had been telling her how greatly he rejoiced that he was permitted to devote his energy and his talents to the cause of the people, and she — a trifle impatient perhaps

with the vagueness of it all — said to him with a frankness that would have been brutal if it had not been childlike in its sincerity :

“ Mr. Stanley, you talk eloquently about these things, but just what does it all mean? Won’t you tell me? Or is it that you don’t quite understand it yourself? ”

“ With pleasure,” he replied, smiling in his superior way. “ It means the betterment of the conditions of life among the mountain people. That is what I am seeking to bring about.”

“ But how? What do you purpose doing to that end? What does your measure provide for that will give them a better chance? I suppose I’m very dull, but really I don’t understand. Won’t you tell me in plain, simple words, so that I may understand? ”

“ Your request opens the way for me to say something that I have long wanted to say to you, Miss McGrath, — Irene; something I have wanted to say ever since you rejected my first proposal at Redrock. You are not dull of understanding, as you suggest, but these are things that one cannot explain in a few words

246 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

or at a single sitting. If you will put yourself in position to sympathize fully with my purposes and with me, you'll come to understand. Irene, I have asked you once to marry me; I now ask you again. You are the only woman to whom I would humble myself by a second appeal. I could pay you no greater compliment than that. Say that it shall be so, that you will share my life and inspire my work and become my partner in achievement. Believe me it is no small career to which I invite you — no meagre stunted ambition that I shall labor to satisfy. Say — ”

“ I cannot say what you wish, Mr. Stanley. I wish you had not — ”

“ One moment, please,” he interrupted; “ I beg that you will not decide so important a question without due reflection. It seems to me that such a proposal from a man of my character and position deserves a greater degree of — ”

Whether inspired by a mischievous malice or merely the accident of hurried speech, her quick coming response was one that might have made a less self sufficient man wince.

"I fully recognize the fact," she said, "that the character of the gentleman concerned is an important consideration in such matters as these. In this case I need no further time. My decision is final. What you wish can never be."

"But think, Irene —"

"I am Miss McGrath," she said, and the reminder irritated him.

"Of course. You are Miss McGrath, daughter of Marcellus McGrath. I should have remembered that while seeking alliance with your distinguished family. I was going to say —"

"You need not say it," she responded quickly. "Good morning, sir!" and in an instant she had quitted the room.

To Helen she explained, saying:

"Perhaps he was not insulting, — he was merely insufferable. Let us forget all about the incident."

"Certainly, dear. We'll ask Father to let us return to Redrock to-day. Tom is in town and he's sure to go with us as a gallant out-rider. I quite agree with you that Stanley is

248 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

insufferable. Somebody once said that 'women are made to suffer — men to be suffered,' but we'll not consent to suffer Stanley again. He is really beyond bearing."

This speech, delivered with more than ordinary intensity of feeling, puzzled Irene not a little. Ever since that day at Redrock she had feared that Stanley had made a tender impression upon Helen. That fear was gone now, and Irene saw hope for the fulfilment of her desire with respect to Tom and Helen. If there was a touch of melancholy in the hope, Irene could not have explained the fact even to her own satisfaction.

XXII

WHEN Irene so abruptly and so resentfully put an end to Stanley's interview, a man of finer fibre than he would have recognized his discomfiture as final and hopeless. On the other hand, a man of finer fibre could never have addressed to such a woman the insulting words he had used.

Being the coarse-grained man that he was, Stanley saw nothing hopeless in the situation. He was angry with Irene, but that was chiefly because of the annoying obstinacy of the girl in rejecting his suit for the second time. He was utterly unable to account for that except by referring it to sheer wilfulness, with some aid, perhaps, from her misconception of her own position in life.

"I'll soon make an end of her obstinacy," he resolved. "If the circumstances were different, I shouldn't trouble myself further about

250 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

her. I'd let her 'gang her ain gait' and find out for herself what a golden opportunity she had thrown away. But I need her in aid of my ambition, and I mean to have her. I've been too considerate, too polite in my dealings with her. I must change my tactics. As she will not see for herself the necessity she is under of accepting my offer to lift her out of her hereditary position of inferiority, I must explain the matter to her."

He chuckled as a thought occurred to him:

"She complained of the vagueness of my eloquence, and expressed a desire for explanations in plain words. Very well; she shall have what she wants, and enough of it to satisfy her utmost cravings in that way. And after I have explained in plain words how I plan to lift one mountaineer into a larger life, she'll think a good many times before she decides to put my plea aside."

With a brutality of impulse characteristic of his kind, he set to work at once to carry out his purpose. At first he planned to follow Irene to Redrock and "have the thing out," in another personal interview with her. But

he reflected that she might refuse to see him on pretence of a headache, or if she received him she might "fly off the handle again" and terminate the interview before he could fully present the case. On the whole he thought it would be wiser to put what he had to say in writing and send it to her as a letter. "Then she'll simply have to hear me out," he thought. "Her curiosity will not let her put the letter aside till she has read every line of it."

This is the letter as Irene received it:

"It is for your own sake, even more than for mine, that I am sending you this missive. It is my desire to save you from yourself, from the disastrous consequences of your own mistake. Let me explain, in those 'plain words' for which you asked me on a recent occasion.

"I have twice asked you to be my wife, and you have twice refused. I am persuaded that your refusals have been due either to an inexcusable wilfulness, or, more probably, to a failure on your part to consider all the circum-

252 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

stances of the case, and to appreciate what your refusal, if persisted in, must bring about in your own life. I am, therefore, giving you another chance — the last I shall offer if you reject it, as I do not think you will.

“ You are living at present in a fool’s paradise. You have been educated, cultivated, refined into the semblance of that class with which you now associate, and to which your personal qualities entitle you to belong. But you do not belong to it in fact. You are ‘ in it but not of it,’ as Byron says. Your place in such society is temporary and insecure. I offer you an opportunity to render it secure. I am, as you know, a successful lawyer and I am in the line of promotion in statesmanship. The session of the Legislature is drawing to a close, and when it ends I shall resign my seat and become a candidate for Congress at the special election called for May, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of the Representative from our district. My election is practically sure. You, as my wife, can make it absolutely so. This opens for you a social career, both in Washington and in Virginia,

such as must be otherwise impossible to you. For it is not as if you had been born in high social position and might expect to marry pretty nearly whomsoever you would. For a very little reflection will show you that no young man of the aristocratic class in Virginia is likely to marry a woman, however beautiful and charming she may be, who is the daughter of a mountain schoolmaster and his illiterate wife. To use the 'plain words' you profess to prefer, you were born in that class which is contemned in Virginia as 'poor white trash.' I offer you an opportunity to marry into the higher social class for which your mind and your accomplishments peculiarly fit you. If you foolishly throw that opportunity away, as I cannot believe you will, you must either remain all your life a dependent upon your well to do friends, or you must lapse into the class from which you sprang, and for contentment in it your culture utterly unfits you.

"I sincerely trust you will approve the plainness of speech I have used in thus setting forth the facts of the case for your consideration. Believe me when I say that it pains me

254 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

to remind you of circumstances which you would probably prefer to forget. I do so for your own sake in order that you may have opportunity to forget them in the protecting shadow of my name.

"I shall follow this letter at an early day with a personal visit to you at Redrock, where I shall again prefer my suit with all the ardor of a passionate and sincere nature. In the meanwhile I beg you to consider what I have said as calmly and judicially as you can. If you will do that, I have no fear of the result of my wooing, as I have none concerning your happiness in the brilliant social career that will open to you as my wife."

This letter came to Irene at the breakfast table at Redrock. Governor Hargreaves and his wife were in Richmond, and as Miss Ann and Aunt Susan were still in their bedrooms, the breakfast company consisted of Helen, Irene, and Tom Hardaway, who had spent the night at Redrock:

Upon opening the missive, Irene exclaimed:

"Psha! It's from that pestilent fellow

Stanley. What can his impudence find to say to me in so long a letter? "

" I'll tell you how to find out, Irene," said Tom, who was now privileged to omit the handle to her name.

" How? " she inquired.

" By reading the thing. That's as easy as wondering about it, and greatly more satisfactory. We'll all excuse you for letting your coffee grow cold while you pursue your investigation."

Irene accepted the suggestion, but she had not read far before an angry flash of her eyes and a hot color in her face revealed to the rest that she was highly incensed. The rapidly changing expression of her countenance as she continued to read told of insult, mortification, grief and a colossal anger.

" Has the fellow insulted you, Irene? " asked Tom as the girl passed the letter to Helen, saying only: " Read it."

" Yes and no. What he has written would be insulting and cruel if it came from a gentleman. But no gentleman could have written it, so the ' if ' is absurd."

256 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"You must return this to him without a word," said Helen, "and I'll ask Father to forbid him the house at once."

"Please do nothing of the kind yet," asked Tom, white to the lips with anger, though he had not seen a line of the letter. It was enough for him to know that Irene had been insulted, for in that moment he had learned the truth, that he loved Irene McGrath as he had never expected to love any woman.

"But why not Tom?" asked Helen.

"Because as the nearest male friend Irene has within call, I claim the right to attend to the matter myself. It is men's work, this, and I shall make it such."

With that he quitted the house and a few minutes later the two young women caught sight of him on horseback and riding at a furious pace. That was always his way on occasions of profound emotional disturbance.

"He is very angry," said Irene.

"He is more than that," replied Helen. "If it were only anger he'd do something instantly and have it over with. There is something else."

"Can you guess what it is?"

"I think I can, but you mustn't ask me — because I'm not sure."

No more was said for a time. Perhaps Irene had some half perception of the truth, and shrank from mention of it.

After a while she asked:

"What do you suppose he will do, Helen?"

"Force a fight with Stanley for one thing; and probably something else, before or after that."

Irene made haste to speak again — perhaps in fear that her friend might tell her what the "something else" was.

"But he doesn't know what is in the letter," she said. "He hasn't read it."

"He knows it was insulting to you, dear, and that is all he cares to know."

"Oh, but, Helen, he mustn't be permitted to fight a duel for me. You must help me prevent that."

"My dear Irene, I'd as soon think of trying to stop a railroad train with my hand as of preventing Tom from doing what he is minded to do. But you can be easy. He will

never let anybody know that his quarrel with Stanley is in any way about you. Gentlemen never permit a woman's name to be dragged into their quarrels."

"Oh, I know that, but that isn't what I'm thinking about. He might be killed —"

"Gentlemen are always ready to take the risk of that in behalf of those they *love*."

The stress she put upon the last word made an end of the conversation, so far as Irene was concerned. Helen presently added:

"We are women; we must not interfere. In such matters gentlemen know what is best — and they do it."

That utterance reflected the attitude of mind that every high bred Virginia woman occupied in those old days. It was an attitude of measureless loyalty and willing submission to those to whom they looked for protection and to whom, in return for worshipful deference, they gave limitless and loving obedience.

XXIII

TOM HARDAWAY did not return to Redrock that day, as the young women had expected him to do. After a gallop of a half mile, followed by a mile or two of rapid trotting, he slowed his horse down to a foot pace but did not turn him around. He rode on toward Richmond instead, planning as he went the course he would pursue in dealing with Stanley.

Instead of going to a hotel as he usually did when he meant to remain for a time in town, he stabled his horse and walked to Jack Towns's house in Grace Street.

Jack was a confirmed bachelor, in spite of his frequent fallings in love, but he lived in a large house of his own with "a retinue of inefficient negro servants to neglect it" he explained.

"I like a house of my own," he said; "I like

to live in a place where I have all the room I want and a good deal over. I like to feel that if I don't sleep well in one bed there are half a dozen others that I'm free to occupy. I like a place where I need never put anything away, and where I'm sure nobody else will ever have the energy to do it if I don't. I like to have a place where my friends can be comfortable and do as they please, when they come to see me. Then again I've a much better cook than any hotel ever had, and I'm fond of eating the things I like, cooked in the way I like."

In brief Jack Towns had the tastes of a typical Virginian strongly present, and especially the old Virginian's craving for complete personal liberty, unembarrassed by circumstance and unrestrained by convention. His inherited means were not great, but his law practice was large and lucrative, so that he was abundantly able to do as he pleased in such matters.

Hardaway did not find his friend at home. He had not expected to find him there during the business hours of the day, and on entering the house he made no inquiry concerning its owner. He simply spoke a cheery word to the

servant who met him at the always open door and said:

"I'm going into the library, Sam. If anybody asks for me before your master comes home — nobody will of course, — but in case anybody should, your memory is to become a blank; you are to be a victim of aphasia —"

"What's dat, Mas' Tom?"

"Forgetfulness. You are to forget that I'm here. To the best of your ability you are to 'disremember'; you understand? I haven't been in this house for weeks past. Do you hear?"

In aid of the black boy's hearing and understanding, he slipped a Spanish quarter of a dollar into his palm, and he knew that his privacy was secure while he lolled in the library reading "Gil Blas."

It was nearly dark when the owner of the house returned.

"What's up, Tom?" he asked. "You never come near this place in daylight, of late at least? What's in the wind?"

"Why, I'm hungry, for one thing. I forgot to ask your servants for some dinner. I hope

262 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

you have full, hearty suppers. If you don't mind I'm going to stay here for a day or two."

"Of course. In hiding. Is the affair one in which I can serve you in any way?"

"Not yet. It may develop. By the way, have you any engagement for an hour or two after supper to-night?"

"None whatever. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing except walk down to the Exchange Hotel with me between eight and nine o'clock. I want you to witness a little ceremony — not of marriage, but interesting for all that."

"All right. Shall I go armed?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I can take care of myself. I only want you to see and hear what passes."

At that moment supper was announced, and the two talked of other things, neither of them making the smallest further reference to the coming hotel visit or its purpose, until, as the after supper pipes were lighted, Jack Towns suddenly returned to the subject.

"Don't you think you are treating me rather cavalierly, Tom?"

"How? I'm sure I —"

"In keeping me in the dark about this thing, after asking me to support you in it with my presence. I have no prying curiosity about the matter, but something has occurred to my mind which renders it necessary that I should know whose nose you are going to tweak."

"Why of course, if you wish it. That blatant pretender Stanley has written a letter to Irene which she feels to be insulting, and I have made up my mind to call him to account for his insolence. Of course Irene's name mustn't be dragged into the mess; we must have some other cause of quarrel, and I'm going to the hotel to bring that about. I shall not tweak his nose, unless that becomes necessary, but, as I understand that he holds forth in the corridors there every night, talking in his arrogant, dictatorial fashion, I intend to interrupt his discourse and tell him he talks too much."

"And when you have done that?" asked

Jack with the calm of a cross-examining lawyer. "What will happen then?"

"Why, he will either go away and send me a challenge, or he will attempt to strike me so that I may challenge him. I don't care how the thing is arranged, if only it brings about the desired result."

Jack smiled as he leaned back in his chair and quietly puffed at his Powhatan pipe. After a dozen voluminous whiffs he removed the pipe stem from his mouth and said:

"Of course neither you nor I can quite approve the code duello, though we hold ourselves ready to obey its mandates. But there is this to be said in its favor, that it insists upon decency and order in the conduct of a quarrel."

"Of course. But I don't quite catch your point."

"Let me explain then. The code forbids any man of honor to provoke a fighting situation in the case of an adversary who for any reason cannot fight."

"Yes, I know. But Stanley is a stalwart man, possessed of all his faculties, and —"

"True, but he is under the completest disability imaginable."

"What is that?"

"He is a member of the Legislature, and as such he has sworn that he will not engage in any way in a duel during his term; that he will be neither principal nor second in an affair; that he will neither send nor accept a challenge; in brief his official oath as utterly forbids him to resent your insult in the usual way as infancy or imbecility could."

"Do you mean that a member of the Legislature is not to be held responsible for any misconduct he may see fit to indulge in — that he is exempt from the obligation every gentleman is under to answer for his behavior?"

"Under the code duello, yes. If a member of the Legislature, or any other public officer commits an offence against the law, he is answerable to the courts; but he is exempt from all the obligations of the unwritten law, and is deprived by his official oath of whatever privileges the unwritten law confers. He may not accept a challenge or send one. As a necessary consequence, no other gentleman is privileged

either to challenge him or to say or do anything to him of a nature that would call for a challenge from him. If you were to carry out the purpose you entertained a little while ago, he could insist upon the submission of the whole matter to a Court of Honor, and the Court of Honor would not even consider your grievance, or ask what it is. It would consider only your adversary's disability, and it would condemn you for having assailed a man who could not defend himself."

"Then what am I to do in such a case as this?"

"You haven't yet told me what the case is. You are not Irene's brother or even her distant kinsman, I believe. On what, then, do you base your right to defend her sensitiveness? Are you in love with her?"

"Yes, though I didn't know it until this thing came up."

"Very well. Do you know the exact nature or the extent of the affront this fellow has put upon her?"

"No, of course not."

"Then you do not know what your own

case is. Whatever it is, you are not free to provoke a fighting quarrel with Stanley. You cannot do that without falling under condemnation at the hands of honorable men, as one who has assailed a helpless adversary."

"It is a confoundedly perplexing situation," said Tom, presently, "but as you present the matter I don't see what I can do."

"Go and have it out with Irene," suggested Jack. "Now that you've at last found out your own state of mind toward her, she is entitled to know it. Courting is ever so much pleasanter than fighting. I've done both, you know, and am a competent witness."

At that moment the two heard some one with heavy boots on, striding through the hallway, and before they could rise to see who it was, the watchman who was on duty at the executive mansion entered the dining-room.

"I beg pardon for not knocking," he said apologetically, "but there was the Governor's orders. I brought a note from him for you, Mr. Hardaway."

Tom accepted the note and hurriedly read it. Then to the watchman he said:

"Say to the Governor that I'll call upon him within the half hour."

When the messenger had left the room the young man said to his companion:

"It is a summons from Governor Hargreaves — exceedingly courteous but also exceedingly peremptory. I'm to go to him at once. I wonder what it means. He simply can't have got wind of this thing, for I've seen absolutely nobody but you."

"You saw Miss Irene and Miss Helen this morning, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course. But I didn't say a word to them about coming to Richmond."

"Tom, you're very young in some ways. But never mind that. Hurry to the Governor's house, or he'll be sending that watchman to fetch you."

XXIV

WHEN Tom Hardaway failed to return to dinner at Redrock on the day of the letter's receipt, Irene was quick to interpret the fact aright. When he disappeared from sight his horse was headed not toward his own plantation but toward Richmond, and Irene was not long in making up her mind that he had in fact gone to Richmond to force a quarrel with Stanley.

The thought of that distressed her almost beyond endurance. Her imagination conjured up visions of Tom stretched upon the turf of some duelling ground, staring up at the sky with unseeing eyes, his brave young life sacrificed for her sake in what she felt to be a needless quarrel over an affront that she should have borne in silence.

The thought was more than she could endure. In theory she accepted Helen's dictum

that women must not interfere with such matters as this, but in this case she was too greatly concerned to be controlled by any theory whatever.

"If it were anybody else, of course I shouldn't think of moving a finger," she said in passionate explanation to Helen. "But you see it's *Tom* and he may be killed. Oh, Helen, I must stop it, and I will, if it isn't already too late."

"But how, Irene? Even if you could find Tom, and he will take care that you shall not do that, what could you say or do to change his purpose?"

"I sha'n't try to find Tom at all," answered the well nigh frantic girl. "I'm going to Richmond to see your father. He will know what to do. You must go with me, Helen — You will, won't you, dear? If you don't I'll certainly go mad in the carriage and do something to myself."

"Of course I'll go with you, Irene," Helen answered. Then with her practical habit of attending to details she sent for the carriage to be brought to the door immediately, after

which she looked after Irene's dressing while attending to her own, and within a brief while the carriage was on its way.

"I'm not at all sure we're doing right, Irene," said Helen, as the outer gate was passed, "and I'm not sure Father will approve."

"What does it matter?" exclaimed the agitated girl. "Don't you understand, Helen? Tom's in danger and I'll save him if I can, right or wrong. Why, Helen, I'd cheerfully *commit a crime* for Tom's sake."

"Yes, dear, I know you would," said Helen, lapsing into a silence that remained almost unbroken during the rest of the journey.

Thus it came about that while Tom Hardaway and Jack Towns were taking their supper, Governor Hargreaves was hearing from Irene's lips the story of the situation. He decided instantly that under the circumstances Tom would be at Jack Towns's house for the sake of privacy, and, without waiting to read Stanley's letter, which Irene had placed in his hands, he sent his watchman with the summons that Tom received just after supper.

When the messenger had gone, the Governor read the letter carefully and, as he laid it down, he said in that quiet, unemotional tone which he always employed when very much excited — using it as a brake upon the wheels of his fiery temper :

“ I am really sorry that circumstances forbid Tom to chastise the fellow as he deserves. You can rest easy, Irene. There will be no duel, no horse-whipping, no personal encounter of any kind. There are controlling circumstances that absolutely forbid anything of that nature in this case. I need not trouble you with an explanation on that point. You must take my word for it, and you must go now and rest and quiet yourself, for you and Helen must go back to Redrock to-night — after you’ve rested. It won’t do to have anybody outside the family know of your coming to Richmond under these circumstances. Go, now, take some supper and lie down till I summon you. Sleep if you can.”

As he gently ushered her out of the room he kissed her tenderly, soothingly, caressingly, as one might do with a troubled child. At the

threshold she turned her face toward his and said :

“ You don’t know how grateful I am. You don’t know from what you are saving me, and you ought to know. I’ve been planning it all the way in the carriage, and my mind was made up. If any harm had come to Tom, I should have killed Stanley with my own hand.”

“ I believe you would, Irene. There’s a river of Irish blood in your veins and all your life you must be careful not to let it overflow. I shall find a way to punish Stanley more severely perhaps than any violence could have done.”

“ Oh, thank you,” she exclaimed, in positive glee of a childlike sort ; “ I’m so glad of that.”

When Tom came Governor Hargreaves gave him the same reasons that Jack Towns had urged for not seeking a quarrel with Stanley. Then he added :

“ Fortunately I have it in my power to rebuke and punish his insolence without transgressing the rules of gentlemanly conduct in the smallest particular. Read that,” handing the young man a letter he had just prepared.

274 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"As soon as you have read it I shall send it by a messenger who will not fail to place it in the hands of the man to whom it is addressed."

Tom read the missive. It was written upon an official letter sheet and was very brief. It ran:

"**SIR:** I send you this to say that you are never again to enter my house upon any pretext whatever. This prohibition applies equally to my personal dwelling and my official residence. Henceforth you must not attempt to hold intercourse of any kind, personal or official, with me or with any member of my family. I wish also to say that this communication is in no way confidential. I shall speak of its contents whenever I see fit, and you are entirely free to show it at will."

"What does that last sentence mean, Cousin Richard?" asked Tom as he returned the sheet.

"It means that I shall make Richmond an extremely uncomfortable place of residence for Stanley."

"Why, you can't —"

"Tell the story? No, of course not. But I can and will say to others that I have been obliged to forbid that man my house, because of his demonstrated inability to conduct himself like a gentleman. Now let us forget all about him. I have something else to say to you. Helen and Irene are here. They are going back to Redrock to-night and will set out as soon as you are ready to accompany them. The moon will be up by that time, the weather is fine, and the horses fresh. They'll make the journey before bedtime. I want you to escort the young ladies as an outrider, if you will."

XXV

THE homeward journey was a very quiet one, so far as speech was concerned.

Helen had her own reasons for falling into meditation, reasons that she would not have revealed to any other human being even if her life had been the forfeit of silence.

Irene was at one moment too exuberantly happy for utterance, and at the next too greatly troubled in her mind to think otherwise than introspectively. Tom Hardaway was not to lie upon the grass with the death stare in his eyes, with lips relaxed and with the pallor of dissolution in his cheeks, as her imagination had pictured. He was riding out there in the moonlight instead, full of life and vigorous health, possessed of a character she admired and an intellect fit to make him a king of men she thought. Her object was achieved,

whether because of what she had done or because of other things, mattered not at all. Tom was saved and her heart rejoiced.

But then other thoughts came in a surging flood to overwhelm her with shame and fear. She had revealed her love for this man to Helen, to Governor Hargreaves, and worst of all to Tom Hardaway himself.

"And I have given my love unasked," she bitterly reflected. "I have done a shameful thing. What must they think of me? What must *he* think of me? How shall I ever dare look into his eyes again without fear of finding reproach and pitying contempt in them? What shall I do when the carriage door is opened at Redrock? How shall I escape quickly enough? Whither shall I flee? And even if I might escape the reproachful eyes of others, how shall I escape from my own consciousness of shame?"

It was all a distressing puzzle and she could not solve it.

Tom Hardaway, riding alone in the moonlight, had his reasons for silence, too. He did indeed make a gallant effort now and then

278 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

to set conversation going. He would push his horse up close to the side of the carriage and say something that he thought interesting, but after such reply as ordinary courtesy required, silence fell again within the vehicle.

On the whole the silence was not unwelcome to the young man. If there had been conversation at all, it must have concerned itself with indifferent things, and Tom was at that time profoundly interested in subjects of greater consequence. The discovery he had made of his own condition of mind not only interested but perplexed him. How had he happened to fall in love with Irene? And why had he not discovered the fact before? Now that he knew it, it seemed to him that it had been so for a long time, and he wondered how he could have overlooked a matter of such supreme importance.

But chiefly his mind was occupied with the future. He must tell Irene about all this without delay, but where, and when, and how? He tried hard to formulate a little speech for the occasion when it should come, and in fact he devised many gems of utterance, every one of

which the mind that had created them rejected in disgust because of what Tom Hardaway felt to be their eloquent artificiality, their unnaturalness, their unfitness as utterances of an absolutely sincere emotion. He tried to draw upon literature for a suitable form of address, and to that end recalled the crucial love passages of scores of novels. He found nothing there to help him.

"It was all right for those fellows to say what they did, because that's what they felt and thought. They were heroes of romance; I'm only Tom Hardaway, and it's very different. I must be honest and true with Irene, and affectation of speech or sentiment isn't honest or true. Of course I'll make a mess of it, because I'm not used to that sort of thing. I've had no practice. But it shall be an honest mess at any rate."

Then returned another thought that had already sorely troubled him.

"Of course she'll say no. She likes me, and we're good friends and all that, but she doesn't care for me in the way I want her to do. Why should she? She's a superbly beautiful young

280 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

woman, accomplished, brilliant, fascinating, and I'm only Tom Hardaway, plain planter, sunburned, ugly and utterly without any of the soft graces that attract women."

Obviously Tom's knowledge of the feminine character and of feminine ideals of admirable manhood was even less than rudimentary.

"It's a remote chance," he said to himself by way of ending the argument as the caravan approached Redrock. "It's a remote chance, but I must take it, and the sooner the better. After all, I'm prepared for the worst, and there can't be anything worse than that."

As he was thinking thus, Irene was looking at him through the open window of the carriage, with eyes that were strongly prejudiced perhaps.

"How big, and strong, and manly he is!" she thought. "And how gracefully he sits his horse! There never was another such man. And he has intellect of the highest order too and character and culture and taste. Surely he has a right to command and obedience is his due, just because he is he."

Almost immediately the sincerity of that last

thought was put to the proof. In her intent observation of Tom, Irene had not been conscious of the near approach to the house, and was taken by surprise when the carriage stopped, and Tom, leaping from the saddle, bade his horse "stand," and himself opened the door of the vehicle. Irene observed that the horse, though a mettlesome creature, yielded the obedience she had herself decided to be its master's due. As he handed her out of the carriage he said to both his charges, presumably quite as if he had a right to say it:

"Don't go in. The night is fine and we'll enjoy the moonlight in the porch for an hour or two."

The command threw Irene into something like panic. She had cherished a timid purpose of escaping into the house while Hardaway should be helping Helen out of the vehicle. She was sure she could not remain in Tom's company for the briefest time that night. Indeed her fear of standing face to face with him was so great that she had half planned not to appear at breakfast the next morning, but to remain above stairs until he should have left

for his own plantation. Now all her plans were brought to naught. She knew not how she might refuse to obey Tom's command. With a submissiveness that she could in nowise explain to herself, she slowly walked to the porch and took one of the large arm-chairs with which it was furnished. Helen followed, and Tom joined them after he had given orders for the care of the horses. Just as he stepped upon the porch, however, Helen, who had not sat down, passed on into the house and up the stairs, quite as if Tom's rather peremptory invitation to a moonlight hour had not been meant to include her. Perhaps that interpretation of it was correct. At any rate Tom did not call her back. Instead, after the exchange of a few casual sentences with Irene, he crossed the porch, seated himself on its edge, with his feet on the ground, and said to her :

" Won't you come over here, Irene? You'll find the edge of the porch a more comfortable seat than that great clumsy chair. Besides I want to talk to you."

Again she obeyed, reluctantly, but unresistingly — as if under some all controlling spell.

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 283

As she seated herself by his side, Tom gently took her hand in his, saying:

"You know, Irene, I'm a good deal of a donkey. Of course you've noticed that, but not in the way I mean. I found out something this morning that I ought to have known for a long time past, and it startled me. I don't know how to put the matter as I ought, but it's this—I love you, Irene, I love you with all my soul and —"

As he said that he passed his arm about her and drew her head to his shoulder where for a brief moment or two she let it rest. Then—in a passion such as he had never known before—he kissed her half-parted lips once, twice, thrice, and fervently.

Then it was that the girl came to herself, regaining her self control and remembering the part she deemed it her duty to play in this soul drama. Releasing herself she sprang up and in an instant the two were standing face to face in the moonlight.

All of Irene's timidity was gone now, all her self control had come back, and with it had come the resolution—heroic in its courage

284 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

and sincerity — to face the situation bravely, to do what she deemed her duty at all costs, and to be utterly truthful as to her own emotions, however severely the candor of her confession might tax her maidenly modesty.

“Have I frightened you, Irene?” he asked taking both her hands and bringing his face close to hers.

“No, — not that. Why should I be frightened? But you ought not to have — done what you did.” Then uncertainly she added: “At least I think you ought not.”

“Then you cannot love me and you resent the liberty I took?”

“No, no, no! I must be honest, Tom. I do love you, and that is the worst of it all. But for that nothing would matter.”

“Put it the other way,” he said. “Because of that nothing else matters. If you love me, Irene, no fate can do us harm, nothing can ever take away from us the supreme joy of life.”

“Listen, Tom!” she said in a voice that she found it difficult to control. “I have been honest with you, and I must be so to the end.

You deserve that. It is not an easy thing for a girl to tell the man she loves that she loves him when almost in the same breath she must say to him that what he asks can never be — that he must learn not to care for her, that he must go away and never see her again, that he must find some other woman to love.”

“ Stop, Irene. I will not listen to such treason. I — ”

“ It isn’t treason, Tom; it is loyalty. You must hear me out. I have told you that I love you. I tell you now that I shall love you and none other so long as I live. Your kisses shall be yours only and always. No other man shall ever be privileged to caress me in that way, but after this night you must not see me again. It is for your own sake, Tom, for your happiness, to save you from a calamity.”

“ Come and sit down, Irene,” he commanded as one having authority. “ What you have been saying is simple nonsense. I love you, and you love me. What else is there to be considered? I ask you to be my wife. Who is there to say us nay? ”

“ Unhappily, I must do that,” she re-

sponded. "It is a terrible thing to say, Tom; it requires all the courage I possess, but I must say it, and you must believe it."

"I absolutely refuse to believe anything of the kind. I will not have it so, Irene. There is no sense in it."

"Listen!" she said. "You are the son and heir, and you will some day be the head of one of the oldest, proudest families in Virginia, while I — I am 'poor white trash.'"

"Hush!" he interrupted. "Hush! You are the only person living who could have said that in my presence without provoking swift vengeance, and you must not say it again, for it is utterly false. You are a brilliant, beautiful, highly accomplished woman, the one woman in all the world that I love, the woman I intend to make my wife."

"Wait, Tom. Wait and let me speak while I can. You do not understand. You do not know the facts and I must tell you. You have known me only as a member of the family here at Redrock, only as Helen's friend and Cousin Richard's protégée. You do not know the rest. My father is a half-educated moun-

tain schoolmaster, poor because of a fatal defect of character. My mother is wholly illiterate, and — Oh, I cannot talk of them.”

“Why should you, if it distresses you? You are not like that. You are a woman whose love would crown any man’s life with honor, as I mean that it shall crown mine. Now that you have told me you love me, I will take no refusal. Your past is completely passed and gone and there was no shadow of shame in it. It shall be my loving task to make your future what it should be.”

Irene was tenderly touched by the unselfishness of his devotion, but she felt that that very unselfishness emphasized her own duty to save him from an impulsive mistake which might embitter his life. She was well-nigh overborne by his insistent adherence to his purpose, but she had a pride of her own, strong enough to oppose her will to his.

“It seems to you now, Tom,” she said gently and persuasively, “that all these things are indifferent, but they would not seem so after awhile if I permitted you to have your way. You are an optimist. You shut your

eyes to things that you do not wish to consider. You are a man of strong, all dominating will. It is your habit to ride rough-shod over obstacles, to have your own way by taking it with the high hand. But you can no more escape consequences than men of weaker will can. If I were your wife you would loyally cherish me as such and you would do brave battle with fate itself in my behalf. But the fact would remain that you had married a woman beneath you. No man would ever dare tell you so, and you would never admit the fact in your own mind; but it would be a fact nevertheless, and you would know what others were thinking and saying about it."

"Damn others!" he broke in. "Pardon me — No, I will not apologize for swearing in such a case. Others shall not control my life or yours, and very certainly they shall not forbid my love. You must be mine, Irene, you must. It would be different, if you could say you refused because you do not love me. It would be your right to refuse in that case. But you do love me, and you have no right to ruin your life and mine because of the opinions

and prejudices of arrogant and narrow minded idiots. I will not have it so."

Irene was fighting a fierce battle with herself in behalf of what she believed to be right and duty, and the struggle was made the more difficult by her almost resistless impulse to take Tom Hardaway's will for law and to obey his word in sheer inability to oppose it. She now saw a way of escape, she thought — a way at least of gaining time in which to reinforce her fast failing power of resistance.

"You may change your mind when you know the facts for yourself," she said. "As yet you know them only by hearsay and imperfectly. You do not realize their ugliness. You must see for yourself. If ever I am to be your wife, you must ask me at the house of my people, and after staying there long enough to learn what manner of people I belong to. You know I pay my parents a visit once every year. I shall go to them early in June. It is now late in April. If you wish to visit me there, you will be welcome — and you will see your duty more clearly."

"But, Irene, why should you put me off in

290 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

such fashion? It is of no use. I shall not change my mind."

"Wait and see," she said. "I'm tired out now. Please let me go."

A glance at her pallid face showed him how greatly overwrought she was.

"Yes, go now, and sleep. It is my fault that you suffer so."

"I would suffer far more than you dream of, for your sake, Tom," she thought as she moved into the house, but she did not utter the thought.

XXVI

THE news that Governor Hargreaves had forbidden Stanley his house, thus peremptorily cutting off relations with him, spread rapidly. Such news usually does so, especially when, as in this case, the person detrimentally affected by the event is one whom everybody detests without quite knowing why. For Stanley had little by little lost the favor his aggressive good fellowship had at first won for him in Richmond and in the Legislature. Yet he had done nothing that might justify anybody in quarrelling with him, nothing that anybody could cite against him as an offence. It was only that men found him too aggressive, too opinionated, too self-assertive. His manner grated on the nerves of more sensitive men. He was a trifle too "good-natured" in a complacent, patronizing way, — perhaps

292 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

somewhat too ready with familiarity on short acquaintance.

Whatever the reasons may have been, most of the men who had come to know Stanley since his advent in Richmond as a member of the Legislature had come to dislike him, and so the news of his humiliation at the hands of the Governor passed rapidly from mouth to mouth.

For a few days Stanley tried to brazen the matter out.

"Yes, I've had a little tiff with the Governor," he would say in his jaunty fashion, "but it's nothing serious. Hargreaves is touchy, you know, but he'll get over his mad presently." Or he would assume an air of reserve and mystery and say:

"Really, I mustn't talk of that. I have always rather liked Hargreaves, and after all he is Governor of Virginia. My lips are sealed."

Governor Hargreaves gave out no explanation. All that he would say in response to direct or indirect questions was: "I have felt it necessary to sever my acquaintance with Mr.

Stanley because of his demonstrated inability to conduct himself as a gentleman should."

But that was saying much, and as it came from a man who habitually refrained from saying anything at all to the discredit of others, it carried with it an unusual weight of condemnation. Men drew their own inferences. They argued that Stanley's conduct must have been positively atrocious to draw such censure from such a man as Colonel Hargreaves.

Many of them "cut" Stanley without hesitation. Many others took less aggressive ways of manifesting their desire to end their acquaintance with him, and within less than a week that happened which Governor Hargreaves had predicted to Tom. Richmond became too hot to hold Stanley, whose excessive vanity added point and poignancy to the affronts put upon him.

He did not wait for the adjournment of the Legislature, but retired to his home several days before that event, pleading in explanation the pressing nature of his business as a lawyer.

Soon afterward the special election to fill the congressional vacancy was called, and Stanley

announced himself as a candidate — as was the custom in those days, before “organization” in politics had robbed the people of their right to vote for whomsoever they pleased.

His opponent was one Carney, who had the advantage of being a mountaineer by birth, though he was now practising law in one of the Piedmont counties of the district. Carney was fairly popular, very shrewd and sufficiently unscrupulous in getting votes to endanger Stanley's chances very seriously in the highland region. Stanley belonged, on the other hand, to the party that was usually dominant in the district, and his election was reasonably sure, unless there should be “a slump in the high mountains.”

To prevent that was the task Stanley set himself, and day and night he worked at it.

Rumors of his rupture with Governor Hargreaves were in circulation — vague, distorted rumors, which were nevertheless likely to prove hurtful, particularly as a suspicion had somehow arisen that the trouble had come about because of Irene McGrath. She was a heroine now, among the mountaineers, their one con-

spicuous representative in Richmond society and among the Piedmont and low country people. Nothing definite was known or could be learned. Indeed nobody knew where, when or how this suspicion itself had had birth; but whenever it was mentioned, there was an ominous shaking of heads, meaning, as one mountaineer more outspoken than the rest had put it:

“Ef that air feller Stanley has been a doin’ of anythin’ gravelly like to our gal Irene, w’y he’d better screw his head purty tight on to his shoulders.”

Carney was prompt to see the importance of this matter and he made a journey to Richmond to find out what he could about it. On every hand he was told precisely what Governor Hargreaves had said about it. To this men now and then added that “Stanley was mighty sweet on that beautiful Miss McGrath until the trouble came. In all probability the ungentlemanly conduct the Governor refers to had something to do with that.”

Suggestions of this kind were made so frequently that Carney presently decided to accept

them as the true explanation of the affair, and to take the risk of saying so in the mountains. He said it cautiously, obliquely, by implication rather than by direct assertion, but still with enough of positiveness to stir up angry questionings among the mountaineers. They were bent upon knowing precisely what Stanley's offence to Irene was, for they had scarcely any doubt in their minds that there had been an offence and that Irene had been the victim of it. They did not go to Stanley with their inquiries, but to Judy Peters, in whose sagacity and ability to find out whatever she wanted to know they had unbounded confidence. They knew also that nobody in the mountains was prouder than Judy of Irene's rise in life. Stacked in a corner she had all the newspapers that had chronicled the mountain girl's triumphs as a belle, and she was much given to the exhibition of these accounts to her visitors, with the triumphant and unanswerable query: "What d' you say to poor white trash *now?*"

But Judy was like Divine Providence in that she "moved in a mysterious way" in car-

rying out her purposes. To every one who spoke to her about this matter she said:

"Don't you go to mussin' with it. I'll ten' to that when I git a good ready."

After a time, she sent one of her henchmen to a meeting where Stanley was to speak.

"You jest go over there, casual like, an' say to Bill Stanley as how Judy Peters is a expectin' him to ride over her way this evenin' an' maybe spend the night. Say it jest the way I'm a givin' of it to you, do you hear? Say 'maybe' jest the way I put it in — 'an' maybe spend the night.'"

When the messenger had gone Judy called Sapphira and gave the order:

"Sapphiry, you git yer sunbonnet on, an' go out to the fence an' stay thar' right in your tracks with both your eyes peeled, tell you see Lem Fulcher a comin' along. Then you come an' let me know."

Judy's house had some conspicuous advantages of situation. Among these was the fact that it completely commanded the highway over which the men of the high mountains must travel when they went up the mountain or

298 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

down it. The road divided into many branches both east and west of her place, but there was the one thoroughfare over the ridge on which her house stood, so that no matter whence a wayfarer came or whither he was going, he must pass Judy's house.

It was Judy's habit to keep herself informed as to the movements — past, present and future — of her neighbors, and she knew that Lem Fulcher was going down the mountain that day.

When at last Sapphira announced his approach, Judy sent the girl away on some domestic business, and herself went out to the roadside fence to intercept him.

"What time'll you be a comin' back by here, Lem?" she asked after bidding him "howdy."

"Oh, I reckon long about an hour by sun," he replied, meaning an hour before sunset.

"Is you shore?"

"I reckon I is, — an' anyways I'll make it shore, Judy, ef you says the word."

"Make it shore then," she replied, "an' stay here to supper. What's the news over your way?"

"W'y, I reckon you must 'a' heard. Irene McGrath's come home to nuss her mother. She's ailin' like — "

"Irene ailin'?"

"No, her mother. She's got all sorts o' things the matter of her, the doctors says, an' I reckon it's so. Anyhow Irene says to me as how she reckons she'll stay here in the mountings as long as her mammy needs her, like. She's a powerful fine gal, that thar Irene."

"I reckon you're right for wunst, Lem. Well, don't stay here a chinnin' with me, or you won't git back by an hour by sun."

As Lem moved off down the road, he muttered:

"Wonder what Judy's up to now? She never lets on, like, when she's riled up, but she's got a mad on with somebody now, for shore. Glad 'taint me, an' I reckon I'll be back thar at the 'p'inted time, 'thout a shadder o' turnin' as the preachers says. 'Twouldn't be good for my wholesome to be late an' put Judy on edge like."

As Judy walked slowly from the fence to the house, she reflected:

300 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

“Lem’s in good fightin’ shape, for shore, an’ he’s that proud o’ the gal ’twon’t take much impidence to set the works a goin’ inside of him.”

XXVII

N EWS travels quickly in the rarefied air of the high mountains, and its starting point is often shrouded in mystery. It was so on this occasion. It was whispered about the neighborhood that "Judy Peters is got somethin' up her sleeve fer to-night." Whether the messenger she had sent to Stanley talked indiscreetly, or whether, as was the more likely explanation, Stanley himself boasted of the invitation, or whether the news leaked out in some other way, it became known that day to all of Judy's near neighbors — those dwelling within half a dozen miles of her — that the queen of the mountains had "sent a bid" to Stanley to come to supper and "maybe to stay all night."

As these her neighbors were a good deal stirred up in an unpleasant way about Stanley,

and as Judy had darkly intimated to them her fixed purpose to " 'tend to his case," they were naturally eager to learn the result of the conference at the earliest possible moment. To that end, one by one, they "dropped in" at Judy's while she and Stanley were at supper, with Lem Fulcher, silent and moody, to make a trio at table.

They did not enter the house for the reason, doubtless, that Judy did not ask them to do so. They contented themselves with "hangin' round outside" awaiting events.

The supper was all that hospitality, aided by experience, could make it. A list of the things served would perhaps encounter criticism at the hands of a professional caterer, but that is only because of the caterer's ignorance as to what is good, doubtless. Judy would have decided the matter in that way, and in the mountains Judy's decisions were apt to be final.

Stanley tried hard to hide the fact, but he was exceedingly uneasy during the meal. Judy was most gracious in her hospitality, but Stanley knew her too well to reckon over-confidently upon that. It was easily possible for

Judy Peters to be too smiling, too gracious, with some fell purpose behind her hospitality. Nevertheless Stanley hoped, while he feared, and he employed every art he knew to win favor in his hostess's eyes, and still more to avoid giving her offence in any one of a score of ways in which he knew that it was possible to rouse her wrath without intending anything of the kind. He talked hopefully of his prospects of election, but was careful not to talk too confidently. He complimented the supper before him, but was at pains to avoid superlatives, lest Judy should suspect him of flattery, and resent the implied imputation that she was weak enough to be won by cajolery. He ate heartily, but with a forced appetite sadly impaired by uneasiness of mind.

On the whole, when the meal ended, he was disposed to congratulate himself upon his success in getting through it without disaster.

Then Judy got out her bottle of apple jack, and insisted upon "fa'r drinkin' all round." It was not until she believed two purposes accomplished that she took personal control of the situation by herself directing the conversa-

304 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

tion into such channels as she wished. One of those purposes was to excite a spirit of unruly belligerency in Lem Fulcher; the other was to unseat Stanley's discretion.

When she deemed the time ripe she smiled at Stanley, saying:

"I don't reckon you's a carin' fer that thar spat you had with Governor Dick Hargreaves, down Richmond way?"

"No," he answered; "I don't think it necessary, here in the mountains at least, where people believe in a fair fight and no favor. I haven't gone into that in any of my speeches, because I think —"

As he hesitated for a phrase, Judy interposed.

"I reckon that's all right. Public speakin' is one thing an' talkin' with frien's is another. So tell us 'bout it — Lem an' me — jest confidential like an' friendly."

"I really oughtn't," he pleaded. "You know where a lady is concerned —"

"Who was the lady? They do say you was sweet on Irene McGrath. Was it her?"

Fearing to offend by refusing to answer, and

yet fearing to answer, Stanley braced himself with another drink of the apple brandy, and then tried to respond with diplomatic reserve, and chiefly in hints, innuendoes and vague suggestions. Presently Judy interrupted him.

"See here, Bill Stanley, you's a dodgin' an' a beatin' round the bush, an' I ain't used to that, nor yet is I a goin' to git used to it. It's all well enough down Richmond way I reckon, but us folks up here in the mountings gits 'spicious-like when a feller don't say right out what he means, but goes to hidin' fac's by wollop'in' 'em up in words. I axed you 'bout that air thing, friendly like, not a thinkin' they was anything in it much, but now I reckon I'll change my think, ef you don't pull up your hosses an' jest tell about it."

Stanley was desperately frightened. He knew that if Judy Peters should give the word in the mountains his hope of election would lose much of its reason for being. He felt that at all hazards he must meet her demand for plain speaking, and yet he knew that plain speech, of the kind that his vanity alone al-

306 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

lowed him, would be exceedingly dangerous in other ways.

But his discretion was seriously impaired by his potations and his judgment was not alert enough for the occasion. Putting on his most confident air he answered :

“ Why, of course, Judy, I’ll tell you all about it, if you really care for the story. I’d a good deal rather not speak of it at all, as it may seem conceited in me to say what I must. You know people think me — well, the sort of man that young girls are foolish enough to fall in love with. Of course I can’t help that, and I don’t think my worst enemy could blame me for it. When Governor Hargreaves begged me to give up my plans last Christmas and spend a fortnight at his house, Redrock, I accepted because he and I were interested in some plans for — well never mind that. I went to Redrock and there Irene McGrath became interested in my plans; she wanted to talk with me about them all the time, and I humored her as far as I thought proper. How could I know the girl was madly in love with me? Fact is I never even suspected it till — well till she

threw herself at my head, as we say. Then I simply had to write her a letter, and perhaps I used too plain words — ”

At this moment Lem Fulcher slowly unlimbered himself, and rose from his chair, as he spoke. His words, as they flowed from his lips, were plain enough and emphatic enough to satisfy even Judy Peters's exacting demands in that respect.

“ Bill Stanley,” he said, “ you's a liar. Ef I wan't a member in good standin' in the Baptis' church, I'd put it stronger an' call you a damned liar. I reckon you can consider them words said an' meant. I reckon you's a lyin' about the nicest an' sweetest an' best gal ever raised in these here mountings, an' I reckon you'll eat your words purty quick er I'll lick you tell your hide won't hold shucks.”

The vital characteristic of this little speech was its sincerity, and its eloquence was rendered effective by the extraordinary promptitude with which the words were translated into action. For as his lips emitted the word “ shucks,” Lem's huge fist landed between .

308 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Stanley's eyes, with the precision and very nearly the force of a sledge-hammer.

The Marquis of Queensbury had not been born at that time, and his rules with regard to fisticuffs, if they had been propounded among the men of the mountains, would have been deemed ridiculous. When two men fought up there, they fought to "lick" each other. Everything was directed to that end, and everything that might contribute to its accomplishment was deemed legitimate.

When Stanley went down, therefore, Lem Fulcher jumped on him, seized him by the throat and began to deliver smashing and stunning blows about his head.

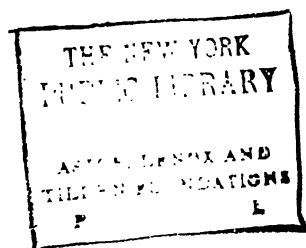
The other mountaineers who were loitering about the place fully satisfied their sense of duty in the premises by surrounding the contestants, everybody shouting "Part 'em! part 'em," but nobody attempting to do anything of the sort.

Judy promptly overruled even this ineffective suggestion of interference.

"Let 'em alone!" she cried. "Bill Stanley's got a long tongue in his mouth, an' he



"BILL STANLEY, YOU'S A LIAR"—Page 307.



IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 309

can holler 'Nuff' when he thinks he's got enough."

The accepted form of surrender in such battles as this was for the beaten man to cry "Enough," but when some well defined issue was involved in the controversy the victor had a recognized right to hold his victim in restraint and demand his assent to specific terms of peace, before releasing him.

In this case Stanley was so quickly and so badly beaten that the cry of surrender was not long delayed. Then, still retaining his hold upon his adversary's throat, and poising his huge fist ready for another blow, Lem "heard him say his catechism," as Judy phrased it.

"Was you a lyin' when you said that 'bout Irene McGrath?"

"I made a mistake —"

"No, you didn't," said Lem with a motion which suggested another succession of blows. "Don't you tell no more lies 'an you must. Was you a lyin' when you said that 'bout Irene McGrath? Yes or no, quick?"

"Yes."

310 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"Is you ready to 'fess, in the presence of the brethering here assembled, as how 'twas all a infernal lie what you tole me an' Judy? Yes or no, quick?"

"Yes," feebly answered the badly battered candidate for Congress.

"Will you ever do it agin?"

"No."

"Do you sw'ar it?"

"Yes."

"Then git up an' go an' wash yourself, you mis'able whelp," and with that he released his hold and arose.

But Stanley did not obey the injunction. He was too badly stunned by the beating to rise to his feet. He managed, with effort, to raise himself to a sitting posture, but after a few moments he fell back prostrate and well nigh unconscious.

Judy gave orders and some of the mountaineers carried the man indoors and placed him on a bench in the passageway. Judy, not very tenderly, washed away the blood, exposing the swollen and purple areas upon which Lem's fist had done its work. As she did so

Stanley revived sufficiently to understand what she meant when she said:

"Now I reckon you can figger out the meanin' o' them words I sent you. I tole you to come to supper an' *maybe stay all night*. You see I couldn't tell for certain how bad a lickin' Lem was a goin' to give you, an' so I didn't know whether I'd have to keep you all night or not. I reckon it's got to be that way now."

In the meanwhile all the men who had gathered at Judy's place to get the news had hurried away to tell it, and by the next day Lem Fulcher was a hero whose praise was in everybody's mouth.

And why not? Do not refined, educated, civilized people make heroes out of generals who succeed in the brutal work of war? Is there any hero worship comparable with that given to the most notable slaughterers of men in every age?

Stanley, of course, was at the end of his career. There was no need for Judy to give so much as a hint of her wishes as to the voting. Not only were all the mountaineers

312 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

his enemies now, but his confession that he had lied to the discredit of a woman so outraged sentiment throughout the district that the prominent men of Stanley's own party promptly forced him to withdraw from his candidacy. His wounded vanity forbade him ever again to appear in a Virginia court or to strut about a county seat, lest men should jeer at him unbearably. There was but one course open to him. He abandoned his practice and migrated to the far South.

XXVIII

IT was Tom Hardaway's cherished conviction that he was master of himself under all circumstances, that he never "lost his head" or suffered himself to be jolted out of his self possession by any event. He was a good deal surprised, therefore, and not a little displeased with himself when he found himself walking the porch in a mood of agitation after Irene had left him. He decided to sit down and be calm. He sat down, but calmness refused to come at his bidding, and a few moments later he found himself restlessly pacing the porch again. He made up his mind to get a book and go to bed, but when he tried to select a book an overwhelming sense of the inadequacy of literature and its impertinent insistence upon the attention of one who has other things to think of, overcame him. Finally he quitted the house, walked briskly to the stables,

316 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

her to change her mind and give me my answer immediately. After all, it is merely a matter of time, after the confession of love she made to-night. That's the way to settle it. I'll write at once, and send a chap with the letter at sunrise. No, on the whole I reckon that would be too early; the letter might get there before she has her breakfast, and it's important that she shall be thoroughly rested and calm when she reads it. I'll fix upon the hour when morning comes; the thing to do now is to get the letter ready. After all, women are not so hard to understand if you allow for circumstances. I've had no experience in this sort of thing, but I flatter myself I've worked out that riddle as cleverly as Jack Towns himself could have done it."

Passing into the hall he found a few matches — things very little used on the plantations in those days — and lighted a big "solar" lamp, which was in all respects a satisfactory illuminating device except that it never would give out more than a dim halo of light through its groundglass globe. He decided to reinforce it with candles, and as the servants were all

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 317

asleep, he brought these from his own room, where a dozen of them always awaited his going to bed. Lighting all of them he proceeded to write, setting forth his confident conjecture that weariness and nervous strain were Irene's only reasons for deciding to make him wait for more than a month and then ask her at the home of her childhood for an answer which she might as well give him at once.

"It isn't as if you were uncertain of your feeling toward me," he explained; "you settled all that to-night, or last night rather, for the day is near at hand now. You have told me you love me. You have told me with passionate emphasis that you can never permit any other man to love you as I do. It only remains for you to say you will be my wife, and you will relieve a badly disturbed mind, and make its possessor the happiest man in the world, by saying that now. I'll ride over late in the day and beg you to do that. You see, Irene, it is absolutely useless to make me wait. I have told you already, and I now tell you again, that nothing, absolutely nothing in the world can ever make me change my mind in

318 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

this matter. I love you too much for that. I love you in all the ways there are of loving — passionately, tenderly, madly and sanely. Indeed loving you is the very sanest thing I ever did in my life, and I'm going on being sane in that way as long as I live. Surely you understand and believe me, Irene! Surely, now that you are rested and calm, you will say to me what I have asked you to say! Surely you will not subject me to a month of exquisite torture, now that I have explained to you how useless it is! I'll be at Redrock to supper, and after supper, when we can be alone, I'll ask you again as I asked you before, as I am asking you now, and as I mean to go on asking you till you say 'Yes' to my suit. Perhaps you won't make me wait till after supper? It seems so endlessly long to wait. Why can't you just say 'Yes' to me when I get there? You can easily find a chance to slip that one little word into the conversation without being overheard, and it will mean so much of joy to me! Won't you do that much for me, Irene?"

How much longer he would have made this letter, if he had been left undisturbed, it is idle

to conjecture. He was not left undisturbed. Daylight had come half an hour before, and as he wrote his last passionate plea, the housemaids trooped in with their rubbing mauls and their bags of "pine tags" to do the daily polishing of the floors.

It was impossible of course to go on writing while the swish of the rubbing mauls should continue. So he signed and sealed the letter and hurried away to the stables to give his directions for the day.

Tom did not expect a reply to his letter, but he got one. Irene sent a note by his returning messenger, in which she said:

"As I am a woman, your letter could not have failed to gratify me, and yet it distresses me far more, and I wish, more earnestly than I can make you understand, that you had not been moved to write it.

"I can't answer it now — probably I never shall be able to do so. I am writing this just to save you from a disappointment. I simply cannot give you the answer you want, either now or for a long time to come — perhaps never. And for your sake it had better

be never. At any rate it was not in obedience to a whim that I said to you what I did. It was a matter of duty and principle with me to make the conditions I did. Perhaps even after you shall have complied with my wishes in that respect, I shall feel myself bound to deny you what you ask. I do not know. I cannot tell. At any rate I beg you not to come to Redrock for several days to come. I ask this not to spare myself agitation and distress — not on any selfish account indeed. There are other things, other — No I must not explain. Please stay away for a while, that's all."

XXIX

WHEN Helen passed from the porch into the house, on the night of Tom's proposal to Irene, she knew, far better than Irene did, and even better than Tom himself did, what was about to occur.

She had foreseen the event ever since that morning, many moons before, when in answer to her question, Tom had told her he "did not think" he was in love with Irene. She had fought bravely, during all those weeks, to reconcile herself to the fact, and even to school herself to rejoice in it. She had told herself, until her intelligence at least was convinced, that it was altogether better so, that Irene and Tom were the fittest possible mates, that as the devoted friend of both she ought to find nothing but joy in events so fit and right.

But the ache was in her heart still, as she

found out when the crucial time came. She retreated to her room and there fought out a soul battle that left her haggard and pale and tremulous. But before Irene left the porch and joined her in their chamber, she had conquered. When Irene entered, Helen was sitting by an open window through which the moon sufficiently lighted the room without the aid of candles. As Irene entered, Helen shrank away from the window a little, so that her face might not be seen in the full moonlight and her secret disclosed.

Strong, resolute woman that she was, Helen had full control of her voice, and seeing Irene's agitation said to her, as calmly as if no storm had raged within herself:

"Come and sit down, dear, and tell me your good news. I know what it is, but I want you to tell me of it yourself, just as if I knew nothing about it."

"It isn't good news, Helen," Irene responded. "At least I don't think it is. I don't know. Oh, how I wish Tom had fallen in love with you, instead of me!"

As she said that, the overwrought girl laid

her head upon her friend's breast, and let the tears flow.

For a time Helen made no reply except by caressingly stroking her forehead. She was afraid to trust her voice again, especially in an attempt to reply calmly to what Irene had said. She was capable of heroic self sacrifice; she had resolved upon the great renunciation, and she felt herself strong enough to carry out her purpose without faltering; but it required care and effort to control her voice and forbid its betrayal of her. After awhile she felt herself able to speak, and said:

"What a ridiculous pair of children we are, Irene, to sit here crying as if some great sorrow had befallen us when it is the best news in the world! By the way, you haven't told me of it. Go on."

"I don't know how, Helen. Of course you understand what Tom asked me, and it wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't betrayed my own feelings as I did. You see, Helen, I was excited, and distressed, and afraid that what I must tell him would make him think — what wasn't true. And besides he was so per-

emptory, so masterful that I simply had to confess that I loved him, and oh, Helen, think what a position that puts us both in, when I can never marry him."

"Never marry him? Why, how absurd you are, Irene! He loves you and has told you so; you love him and have told him so. Of course you'll marry him. Why not?"

"Oh, he'll never ask me to do that after he sees for himself the manner of people I came from and belong to, and I've told him he must do that before I can give him any answer at all. You see it is only fair —"

"You don't know Tom Hardaway, Irene. He loves you and nothing will ever change that. He is no coward, no weakling. He cares not a snap of the finger what anybody or everybody else thinks, so long as he knows himself to be right. He's the best-natured fellow imaginable, but he's a fighter when the occasion comes, and he would fight the world and Satan himself for the woman he loves. That's the glory of it, Irene! The man who loves you does nothing by halves. He makes no compromises with himself or with anybody

else. I really think there never was such a man as Tom Hardaway, and there never will be another such."

The words startled Irene the more because Helen was habitually cautious of superlatives, but there was something even more startling in the enthusiasm with which they were uttered. The impression made upon Irene's mind was strengthened by the fact that instead of lingering longer in a converse which she had herself sought, Helen almost immediately arose, pleaded headache and weariness, and went to her bed.

Irene did not follow her example. She continued to sit by the window through all the remaining hours of the night in troubled, agonizing thought, that led nowhither and brought no peace to her agitated mind.

There was joy when she remembered that Tom had told her of his love, but there was exquisite distress in the reminder which that thought gave, that she had — as she resolutely insisted upon thinking — robbed her best friend of her life's happiness. Grief, repentance, contrition and impatience with a constantly baf-

fled purpose rent her soul as no emotion had ever done before. Hers was a passionate nature, impulsive, self sacrificing, self immolating if need be, and her capacity of renunciation was as great as Helen's own. But what could she do? If it had been possible to restore to her friend all that she had taken from her, she would have done so even at sacrifice of her own soul. But what Helen had said of Tom Hardaway was true. Having given her the love of his strong manhood, she knew he would never withdraw the gift. If she should repulse him now, it would make no difference so far as Helen's happiness was concerned. Tom Hardaway was not the kind of man to make transfer of his passion from one woman to another, whatever the occasion might be.

When morning came Helen bravely met the day, in spite of headache and lassitude. She seemed both cheerful and cheery, but Irene was not deceived. She did not know that Tom had left the house during the night, and for Helen's sake she dreaded his appearance at the breakfast table. When she learned of his departure her mind was relieved, but when his

letter came, announcing his purpose of coming again that day, she was frightened for Helen's sake. At all hazards she must forbid him to come on such a mission and in such a mood until Helen should have had time to regain her strength. Hence her reply to his letter. It puzzled him and distressed him a good deal, but he had no choice. He must obey, even if it should become necessary to put in still another field full of tobacco by way of distracting his mind.

Another distraction, of which he did not dream, was near at hand, and within a few days it came, in the shape of his mother.

XXX

MRS. BEVERLY HARDAWAY, Tom's mother, was a typical Virginia matron of the old school. Blue blooded from the days of William Byrd and the knights of the golden horseshoe, she was an aristocrat both by inheritance and on principle. It seemed to her an axiom that things as she had always known them were things right, seemly, and of good report. She regarded innovation as of necessity destructive in its influence, unsettling in its impulse, and so obviously and anarchistically wrong as to admit of no argument, no consideration, no shadow of tolerance.

She had been apprehensive of social and political chaos ever since the new constitution of Virginia had been adopted, in 1850. That iniquitous charter of radicalism — for so she regarded it — seemed to her to threaten the

very foundations of society. "Only to think of it," she would say to dames like minded with herself, "every white man can vote now, just as if all of them were gentlemen! And worse still, even the most distinguished gentlemen and largest land owners can vote only once apiece. A gentleman may own plantations in three or four counties, but he cannot vote except once, and that in his home county. It is positively revolutionary. It takes all the picturesqueness and romance out of the thing. Why, in my time, when elections lasted for three days, gentlemen used to ride at top speed night and day, with relays of horses, so as to get their votes in at the court houses of all the counties in which they held land. It was gloriously exciting and inspiring to see gentlemen heroically struggling in that way to bear their full share in the government of the State. Now the commonest men are on an equality with gentlemen. They can vote without owning any land at all, and a gentleman's overseer, or his boot maker, can go to the polls and actually offset the gentleman's vote with his own. It is monstrous!

330 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"Then there's the shrievalty. It used to be an honor to be High Sheriff, because it meant that the gentleman holding the office was the magistrate who had served longest on the bench. The High Shrievalty was his by right, a reward for long service as a magistrate, and it was a very high honor. Of course the High Sheriff was not expected to do any of the actual work — he farmed that out to deputies who needed the pay it brought. Under this new constitution, Judge Hardaway tells me they actually elect the sheriffs, and the very men who used to be hired by the High Sheriff as farmers of the shrievalty can now get themselves elected actual sheriffs."

Mrs. Beverly Hardaway devoutly believed in those social distinctions which had been maintained in Virginia for generations past. Caste was to her as sacred as religion is to the devout. She knew the pedigree of everybody who was anybody in Virginia. The rest didn't count. She held rigidly to all the traditions. Especially she held it to be the duty of every young gentleman to marry. Bachelorhood was not even respectable in her

eyes, and the fact that Tom at twenty-six was still unmarried grieved her mightily. She could not understand it at all. Tom was good-looking, intellectual, educated, socially agreeable beyond the common, and was a well-to-do plantation owner in his own right, "besides being a Hardaway," she concluded, as if that ended the argument. "I've picked out half a dozen nice girls for him, over and over again, but I never could get any answer but a laugh out of him. How he can reconcile it with his conscience to neglect his duty in that way, I simply can't understand. It must be the influence of the low literature he has fallen into the habit of reading. Why, Susan, do you know he not only reads every novel of vulgar English low life that that fellow Dickens writes, but he actually recommends them to other people—even to unformed girls. I suppose his taste became depraved while he was at that Northern college. I always feared some ill result from that mistake."

But when Mrs. Beverly Hardaway picked out "nice girls" for her son to marry, she

332 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

considered pedigree, or "family," as she called it, as a fundamental requisite. When she urged Tom to marry, it was with the implied condition that the bride of his choice should be the daughter of an old Virginia family, whose "goodness" had descended through several generations. "It takes three generations to make a gentleman," she used often to say, "and four at least to make a lady."

It was in no mood of rejoicing, therefore, that Mrs. Hardaway heard rumors that her son Tom was paying his court to Irene. How or where these rumors originated, nobody seemed to know. Possibly Jack Towns had unconsciously set them going; or guests at some of Governor Hargreaves's functions may have observed Tom's attentions to the mountain maid. Whatever the source of the rumors may have been, Mrs. Hardaway promptly decided that they required immediate investigation at her hands.

She had met Irene several times and once had entertained her and Helen in her own house. She distinctly liked the girl in spite

of her origin, and highly approved of her as a companion for Helen Hargreaves. But when Judge Hardaway reminded her of these facts, her answer was ready and to her mind conclusive:

"Of course you don't understand such things, Beverly; the girl is really very nice, in her way, and extremely pretty, and I've been told that she bears herself well in society. But you forget that our Tom is a Hardaway on your side of the house and a Spottswood on mine. The best blood in Virginia flows in his veins without any plebeian admixture whatever. The idea of Tom falling in love with a girl of such origin — mere poor white trash in fact — is preposterous. I'm going to drive over to see him this very day."

"As you please, my dear," answered her husband. "But I'd strongly advise you to find out with certainty what the facts are before applying any disagreeable epithets to her in Tom's presence."

"You forget that Tom is my son."

"No, I remember that; but I remember also that he is twenty-six years of age and

thoroughly equipped with opinions of his own, one of which is that Tom Hardaway is capable of ordering his own conduct in his own way and very strongly disposed to do so. I very earnestly advise you, therefore, not to say anything of a possibly offensive character about the girl until you find out for certain that Tom cares nothing for her."

"Then you would not yourself oppose such a match if Tom is really insane enough to think of it?"

"I certainly should not. I have met the young lady on several occasions, and she impresses me as an exceedingly attractive young person, of high character, whom any full-blooded young fellow like Tom might easily fall in love with. Further than that if Tom has a fancy to make her his wife, I see no reason for objection on your part or mine."

"Beverly, you are as incorrigible as Tom. You forget that she has no family."

"On the contrary, I believe her brothers are unusually numerous, and her parents are still living."

"You know that isn't what I mean. You

are provoking. But I must do my duty, and I will."

"I strongly advise you to do nothing of the kind, unless you want to make trouble with the best son a man and woman ever had. Listen to me, dear, for I am speaking seriously now. You know this young lady to be quite all that any young man need want in a wife. If her father were a hard-drinking, half-educated boor, but of what you call 'good family,' you would accept her gladly as your daughter. Her people are entirely honest, Hargreaves tells me. They are poor I believe, but Tom has no need to look for money with a wife. Absolutely the only thing you can urge against the girl's eligibility, is that her people are not descended from any one of a certain group of families, whom we foolishly call 'good' for reasons that it would puzzle the wisest of us to explain. Many of those families, indeed, seem to me like potato vines, the only good parts of which are underground, as somebody has wittily said of family trees."

"Your levelling ideas are intolerable, Bev-

336 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

erly. And besides, you forget that this girl's mother is quite illiterate."

"That may be. Many worthy people in the mountains are so. But you didn't tell me you feared Tom might marry the mother."

"Beverly, you trifle with serious things most shamefully."

"I suppose I do, at times. But don't you think you yourself will be trifling very dangerously with serious things if you interfere with the honest, manly love of a young man for so worthy a girl as you know Irene McGrath to be? Think of it! You will wound your son's feelings beyond atonement in any case; if you succeed in balking his purpose, you will render his life and the life of an innocent girl unhappy; if you fail, you will establish the most painful relations possible within your own family, you —"

"I can't believe the thing is true at all. I sha'n't believe it till Tom tells me so himself."

"Very well. In that case the counsel I have given you will be unnecessary."

In his thought he added:

"In any case it is wasted."

XXXI

MRS. BEVERLY HARDAWAY very rarely made visits in the country. It was her custom to attend all important social gatherings in Richmond, where she usually lived for three or four months every winter, but when at home on her "plantation" — which covered no more than a hundred acres or so, much of it in house grounds — she excused herself on the plea that her strength was really not equal to the task of driving long miles to visit her friends.

Her husband, Judge Beverly Hardaway, was a learned man in the law and a scholar in other ways. He had a great law practice, and during the years in which he had served upon the bench he had won an enviable reputation as a man of judicial mind, an exacting conscience and unusual industry. He had



338 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

never become rich or even what is called well to do; he had "never had time to make money," and he had never been ambitious of wealth. His little ancestral tract of land, with its large, old-fashioned, hip-roofed house, served him as a sufficient country residence, comfortable and near enough to Richmond for his purposes. He owned a dozen or fifteen negroes, big and little, two or three of whom did the gardening and other outdoor work, while the rest constituted an adequate retinue of house servants for a family disposed to live at ease but without display.

The family carriage, used only at long intervals, was an old one and showed its years in its external appearance; but within it was comfortable, just as the old wooden house was, and just as everything else was over which Judge Hardaway had control. He was a man devoted to realities and either indifferent or antagonistic to shams, according to their extent and the aggressiveness of their falsity.

In her utter satisfaction with the blueness of her own blood, and the equal "goodness "

of the family of which marriage had made her a member, Mrs. Beverly Hardaway felt no need of false pretences, and she made none. She lived simply and was content without wealth, which in her opinion was in itself "vulgar," unless it were inherited through long generations. She held that people born rich were quite as respectable as if their wealth did not exist, but of people who had made money themselves or whose wealth dated from only one generation past, she had a very poor opinion indeed.

The one annoyance to which she was subject was an unaccountable disposition on the part of her husband and her son to regard the claims of birth, family, hereditary aristocracy, and all the rest of the things she held sacred, as themselves shams and false pretences. For both father and son were men too able, too clear-sighted, and too sincere to be other than democratic in the sense in which the author of the Declaration of Independence was so. To Mrs. Hardaway, their "reactionary views and revolutionary opinions" — that was her phrase — were distressing be-

yond measure. She had hitherto consoled herself with the reflection that after all these were merely academic opinions that the two culprits had never translated into action. "They bear themselves as gentlemen should," she explained to herself, "in their conduct at least, and I trust they always will."

But now that she had reason to fear for Tom's conduct as well as for his absurd opinions, she was far more deeply troubled than she had ever been before. She felt that the case called for action — instant and decisive, and after the breakfast-table talk with her husband, already reported, she began her journey to Tom's plantation, Osmore.

"It's a pretty plantation name," she reflected as the carriage rolled out of her own grounds, "and it has the merit of age. That house of Tom's was built in early Colonial days, and it has been a family mansion of the Hardaways ever since. Tom is the rightful heir by direct descent, and it was nice of the Judge's sister to recognize the fact in her will. But then the Hardaways always were nice and attentive to the proprieties of life —

except for the reactionary vagaries of Tom and his father. Just to think of a Hardaway, the inheritor and master of an old family mansion, with such a name as Osmore, turning traitor to the traditions of his race and marrying such a girl as that! Of course she is beautiful and cultivated, and I suppose people find her charming. But what right has a girl like that, a mere nobody, to be beautiful and charming? I believe they do it just to captivate young men of good family and humiliate their mothers. Drive a little faster, Jerry."

That last command was prompted by the good lady's impatience to know the worst and to combat evil fate while there was yet time. And yet as she drew near her destination she wished the journey had been longer, for the reason that she had not been able to work out a satisfactory plan of campaign. That is to say, she did not know how she might approach the matter she had in mind without defeating her purpose at the outset by antagonizing her son. Her husband's warnings on that subject had impressed her more strongly

342 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

than she was willing to admit. She knew enough of Tom's "eccentricity," as she called it, to realize a number of very perplexing possibilities that might become facts if she were not wary in approaching the matter, and just how to be wary and yet reach the subject in conversation, was the question still vexing her mind when her carriage drew up in front of Osmore.

Tom had seen it approach and had instantly made up his mind that there was trouble of some kind coming. For the infrequency of his mother's visits to his place left no room for doubt that this one, unannounced and unexpected, had some unusual purpose behind it. If the visitor had been any person other than his mother, he would have awaited the opening of negotiations in full readiness to take any tone that might seem best, in replying.

"But I can't quarrel with my mother," he reflected, "and this visit means some sort of interference. I'll meet it by teasing her and laughing in what she calls my 'most exasperating manner.' I won't be serious on any conceivable account."

He met the carriage and handed his mother up the walk to the porch with all the gallantry of a knight in service of his queen, but there was nothing in that to awaken suspicion of his mood, for the reason that apart from his affectionate teasing of her he was always more gallant to his mother than to any other woman. He held that to be her due.

"Here, Phœbe," he called to a negro woman, "attend to my mother, and make her comfortable." Then to his mother he explained:

"Phœbe knows how. She used to be a lady's maid when the house enjoyed the benefits of civilization. Since I became its sole inhabitant she has been a sort of housekeeper for me. She looks after the linen, and scolds the house servants and saves me a world of trouble. You'd better let her take you into the large bedroom on this floor; I know you don't like climbing stairs. I'll give orders for snack and have it ready by the time you show yourself again. But if you want to lie down for awhile after your long drive, the snack can wait. You see it's rather used to waiting in

344 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

this house, as I'm apt to forget it when I'm alone here."

"Thank you, Thomas, but you needn't keep it waiting for me. I don't want to lie down, and the drive has made me hungry. I hope your cook knows how to make good tea?"

"Oh, I reckon she does. I never drink it, you know, but she knows how to do everything else that cooks do—even to breaking most of the platters on the place once or twice a month, so I reckon she must know how to do a little trick like making tea."

"Thomas, don't trifle with serious things. If you'll have the boiling water sent into the house I'll make the tea myself."

When she had disappeared with the maid, Tom gave his orders for the meal, and then set himself to see what "tidying up" he might have the servants do in her absence, but after a hurried, masculine scrutiny, he was satisfied that everything was in its place. That was because he preferred things "lying around handy," and his ideas of domestic order were weakened by long disuse.

It did not matter on this occasion. His mother was not minded at this time to criticize housekeeping details. She had something of far weightier consequence to think of. The only thing she said on the subject of housekeeping was in reply to some suggestion of apology on Tom's part.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Tom. I never expect to find a bachelor's house respectable."

She was about to say something concerning the duty every respectable young man was under to be married, but she checked the impulse and quickly spoke of something else. A sudden fear took possession of her that her son might reply by announcing his intention to make Irene McGrath his wife, and she shrank from that as from a blow. Of course if such were the fact she must learn it during this visit, but she preferred to let the unwelcome information leak into her mind, as it were, gradually. She feared that the sudden blurring out of such a thing in Tom's boyish fashion would be more than she could yet bear. So she changed the course of the con-

346 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

versation, and during the afternoon wandered with her son through all the rooms on the lower floor of the spacious old house, talking of things indifferent until it came to the matter of books. Seeing books everywhere, some in cases, some lying open where Tom had last been reading them, some piled in chairs for lack of other accommodation, she turned to her son and asked :

“ How can you live in such a litter, Tom? Why don't you put all your books into one room and call it the library? ”

“ Why, to tell the truth, mother, the house is too big for me already, and if I should build an addition to it, why — ”

“ Build an addition? Surely I didn't suggest any such thing as that.”

“ Oh, yes, you did, mother, at least by implication. You see there isn't a room in the house — big as some of them are — that would hold all my books in any orderly fashion on shelves around the walls. So if I'm to put them all into one room I must build an addition. Or perhaps I might have my prize barn moved up and use that.”

"Thomas, your bad habit of trifling with serious things is positively growing upon you. Allow me to suggest that your library might be reduced to easily wieldy size by the simple process of weeding out the worthless — I might say pernicious — trash you've put into it. If that were done, it would be a library fit for a gentleman's house."

"There's something in that, mother," said the young man in mock seriousness. "Here's a copy of 'Evelina' by Miss Burney, which I'll place in your carriage if you'd like to have it. It's a novel you highly approve, I remember, and you might give it to some dame-nurtured young girl without the least fear that it would put improper ideas into her head, or ideas of any other sort for that matter. Then there's —"

But his mother recognizing his mood and purpose checked him in the catalogue he intended to offer of the "books no gentleman's library should be without."

"Spare me your ridicule, Thomas, I beg of you. You know the books I mean — the radical, levelling, destructive literature that is

348 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ruining our society and threatening to undermine our morals."

"Would you mind being a little more explicit, mother? Or no, you needn't bother. I know in a general way what you mean, and my judgment of the literature you refer to differs from yours. Perhaps that is because I have read it and you haven't. It may be that I'm prejudiced. I've heard it suggested that reading a book is apt to prejudice one in its favor, and it may be that my judgment has been biased in that way by reading Charles Kingsley, Emerson, and others, especially Charles Dickens. Indeed, now that I think of it, I'm sure I must have become prejudiced in that way, especially in the cases of Kingsley and Dickens, for I am morally certain *you* would not approve their work, even if you were to read it. But it would make you laugh and weep, mother mine, and that too in tender sympathy with the joys and sorrows of very common people, some of them illiterate and mannerless, but full of heroic courage and generous self sacrifice for all that. As you refuse to read the books you will never know

what heart beats there may be behind rough coats or what measureless tenderness there may be beneath the bedraggled gown of a woman born to a life of hardship, toil and suffering; for the narrowness of the life to which you condemn yourself, with its false pretence of aristocracy, forbids you ever to know such heroes and martyrs in the flesh."

Tom suddenly realized that he was growing serious, as he had resolved not to do. So dismissing his enthusiasm he sought to change the subject, but his mother held him to one part of it at least.

"Why do you speak of our 'false pretence of aristocracy,' Thomas? You cannot doubt that you are descended from the very best families in Virginia."

"Oh, not at all," answered Tom in his lightest tone, for he did not want to argue. "I've been taught all that ever since I was born, and so I'm bound to believe it. And besides, I'm proud of it. It gives me a certain social status which is pleasant enough, and better still it gives me a standard of conduct to live up to. But you see I've read a good deal of history

350 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

and some heraldry and other nonsense, and I can't help seeing that the aristocracy of almost every country consists mainly of the descendants of those who got there first. In England the aristocrats are so chiefly as the descendants of the highwaymen who passed over with the robber chief William the Conqueror to loot England. In New England the aristocrats base their claim to distinction upon their descent from the very ordinary people who first settled there. In New York the aristocrats are those who trace their lineage to the Dutch traders and shopkeepers who came over while the country was new. In Virginia the same plea of priority in immigrating serves our purpose. In all three cases there were doubtless many very worthy people among the earliest settlers, but there were also a good many rascals, some fugitives from justice and many worthless adventurers. One has need to be rather particular in picking out those of the early comers whom he intends to adopt as his progenitors. Oh, by the way, a new humorous poet named Saxe has just been putting my thought so much better than I can that

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 351

with your permission I'll read you two stanzas in illustration."

Taking up the thin little volume so fresh from the press that the ink had not lost its odor, he read:

"Of all the notable things on earth
The queerest one is pride of birth
Among our fierce Democracy;
A bridge across a hundred years
Without a prop to save it from sneers —
Not even a couple of rotten peers —
A thing for laughter, fleers and jeers
Is American Aristocracy.

"Depend upon it, my snobbish friend,
Your family thread you can't ascend
Without good reason to apprehend
You may find it waxed at the other end
By some plebeian vocation;
Or worse than that your boasted line
May end in a loop of stronger twine
That plagued some worthy relation."

Laying the book down, Tom sought again to give new direction to the conversation, and again he failed. His mother refused even to smile in answer to his pleasantries. Instead she made a more direct approach to the sub-

ject that weighed upon her mind than she had yet ventured upon.

"Of course I don't expect you or your father ever to agree with my opinions on the general subject of birth and family, Thomas, though both of you were bred to those opinions, but —"

"Of course we were," he interrupted, "just as we were bred to believe in a score of other falsities and shams that we have since outgrown. That's the way the world advances, mother."

"I was going to say, Thomas, when you interrupted, that while I do not expect you to assent to my opinions in any abstract way, I sincerely trust your personal life will be guided by the principles inculcated in you from childhood. I hope and trust you will never make a *mésalliance*."

"Certainly not, mother. You may rest easy on that point. I shall never link my life with that of a woman who is not gentle, truthful, refined, sincere and in every way capable of gracing the home I give her."

"Your catalogue of her qualities seems to

me inadequate, Thomas. The woman you marry should be a lady above all else."

"Define the term, won't you, mother? As it stands it puzzles me, for certainly a woman who is 'gentle, truthful, refined, sincere, and capable of gracing' my home, is a lady, as I understand that word. What else is necessary?"

"She should be well born," answered the mother.

"Precisely what does that mean?" asked Tom, beginning now to suspect his mother's purpose.

"Oh, you know very well what it means. She should have parents and grandparents."

"Most people have both, mother, though sometimes some of them are dead. It's especially apt to be so in the case of grandparents. Must the supposititious person we are talking about be provided with a full set of live ones?"

"Can you never be serious, Thomas? I wish you would try, for my sake."

The young man had now no doubt in his mind as to his mother's meaning and purpose, and he foresaw the danger that she might say

something which he would feel obliged to resent in a way that he very earnestly wished to avoid. By way of forestalling that possibility he said, slowly and with an emphasis which Mrs. Hardaway recognized as significant: —

“Yes, Mother, I can be serious and I will. You have never understood my views with regard to birth, family, heredity and the rest of it. I respect the realities of all that as profoundly as you can; it is only the falsities, the artificialities, the shams that I detest. I am as proud of my descent from honorable men and good women as you would have me be. I recognize the fact that such descent establishes a presumption, indeed a very strong presumption, in favor of a man’s character; but I also recognize the fact that in each individual case the presumption may suggest an untruth. If I know nothing of a man except that he is the son, the grandson and the great grandson of honorable men and women, I expect to find him on closer acquaintance to be himself a man of that kind; but if I find instead that his character and conduct are un-

worthy, I do not excuse him because of these things; I blame him the more, rather, because he is sinning against the light, because he knows better, because his very birth has provided him with high incentives. I utterly abhor and detest the notion — prevalent enough among people of our kind — that dishonesty, drunkenness, low tastes or any other depravity in such a man must be pitied and hidden and excused because of the man's 'quality.' On the other hand, if I find a man who, lacking such advantages, has achieved high character, culture, refinement and all the rest of it, I give full value to that man's virtues, and accept him for what he actually is, paying no heed whatever to what has gone before."

"That is very well, but when it comes to the closer relations of life, my son, it seems to me the case is different. If a man finds a woman beautiful, cultivated, refined, and in every way charming, he does right to recognize all her good qualities, but if he thinks of marrying her he should inquire concerning her family, for his own family's sake. A young

man of good family, and especially one who, like yourself, is of the very best blood in the land, owes something to his position. He has no right to pollute the stream, by mingling his blood with that of a woman of the lower classes."

"But if the woman is herself all she should be—never mind that. Tell me instead, and plainly, what woman you have in mind, for you are undoubtedly talking at a mark and with definite purpose."

Mrs. Hardaway was so far surprised by the earnestness with which her son asked the question that she scarcely knew how to answer it. There was something in his tone and look that she construed to be a warning to her,—perhaps even a threat. She instantly resolved to be more than careful of epithets in speaking of Irene, and to go out of her way to say pleasant things of her.

"Oh, I suppose I ought not to heed idle rumors," she began, "particularly as I am sure you would make your mother your confidant if there were anything serious. But in this case I can see how strong the temptation

might be. I had in mind that beautiful and charming young person, Irene McGrath."

"What of her?" asked the young man in a voice that sounded hard and unyielding.

"Why, she is really so dear a girl, so bright and so refined, and altogether so charming that I can easily see how a young man might be so fascinated with her as to forget her origin, and when rumors came to me that perhaps you were forgetting in that way, it seemed to me a mother's duty to warn you."

"Warn me against what? Wait a minute, Mother. It isn't fair to let you go on talking without telling you what the facts are. It puts you at a disadvantage. Wait then till I tell you. Irene McGrath is quite all you say, and more. Besides her beauty, refinement, culture, grace and other personal charms, she is one of the truest, noblest women I ever knew. She is capable of really heroic self sacrifice in behalf of another. Indeed she has proved that in her dealing with me, as you shall presently hear."

He paused as if to order his thoughts before beginning the story. But he had already said

enough to reveal a state of mind on his part which positively appalled the proud old dame. She sat still, pale, depressed, alarmed and tremulously awaiting what was to come. At last her son spoke, manifestly selecting every word to suit his purpose before uttering it.

"I love Irene McGrath," he began, "and thank God, she loves me. I have asked her to be my wife — implored her, I may truly say. As yet she refuses, and she may refuse to the end; I cannot say. She is as proud a woman as you are, Mother, as true, as honorable and as resolutely devoted to duty as she understands it. I could not say anything stronger than that, in praise of her exalted character."

Grasping at a hope that came from an unexpected quarter, the old lady interrupted:

"You say she has refused you?"

"Not exactly that. She is truthful to the tip of her tongue, and she has met my honest and manly declaration of love with honest and womanly candor and plain speaking. She has resorted to no equivocations, no concealments of truth, no falsehoods of any kind. She has frankly told me that all the love of which she

is capable is mine and shall always be mine so long as she lives. But in a pride of womanhood as great and as noble as your own, Mother, she has reminded me of her origin; she has told me of her father, who is an upright fellow enough but a failure in life, a ne'er-do-weel; she has told me of her mother, an honest woman and a good wife I have no doubt, but uneducated — even illiterate. She has called herself what I would permit no other human being to call her in my presence — ‘poor white trash.’ On these accounts she has urged me to put aside my love and forget her. Yes, forget her for the very qualities that ennoble her in my view. When I refused and insisted upon my suit, she made terms. I must see her in her own home. I must acquaint myself there with all the lowliness of her origin. I must know for myself and not by hearsay what manner of man her father is. I must myself take the measure of her mother’s ignorance. I must see what kind of boys are entitled to call her ‘sister.’ If in the midst of these, her native surroundings, I choose to renew my suit, she promises me an answer —

360 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

yes or no — she will not say which it is to be.

“There! Now you know the facts, and may say whatever you have to say to me, in full assurance that nothing you or anybody else may say can alter my determination to make this most admirable and adorable of women my wife if I can — my wife and the mother of my children — the progenitress of all the Hardaways that are to come after me. I have only to beg of you, Mother, that you will say nothing concerning her that I should feel bound to resent. I should not like to have hard feeling arise between you and me.”

Under the circumstances Mrs. Hardaway thought it wisest perhaps to say nothing. Instead, she rose and sought relief in tears and sorrowful meditation within the chamber assigned to her use. To herself she said, however:

“I must say the girl has behaved right well under the circumstances — quite like a lady born. I admire her pride.”

Then a new thought came to give her hope:

“Perhaps I can make a successful appeal to

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 361

that. I'll try at any rate. I'll drive to Redrock to-morrow morning and lay the case before her."

Mrs. Hardaway carried out that purpose so far at least as driving to Redrock was concerned. But there she learned that Irene had suddenly departed for the mountains — summoned thither by news of her mother's illness.

XXXII

THE news that Irene had been suddenly summoned to the mountains came to Tom on the day of his mother's departure. Irene sent it in a little letter, written chiefly to say that Tom must not follow her until she should invite him to do so.

"My father's letter," she wrote, "leaves me in some doubt as to what my mother's real condition is. Poor Pappy — that's what I have always called him — is apt, when writing, to forget his main subject — if he happens to mention something else that interests him. So until I find out for myself how serious my mother's illness is, I shall not know whether we can entertain a visitor or not.

"But, oh, Tom, what is the use of it all? When you see and know the facts for yourself, you will understand how utterly unsuitable your present desire is, how impossible it is

that I should ever be acceptable to your people. Why not take my word for it and spare both of us the distress of a personal revelation? If you will not be content with that, I'll send you a note when my mother's health permits, and you shall come if you still wish it so. After that you will understand and I will understand, and for a long, long time we shall see nothing of each other — never indeed until we shall have reconciled ourselves with the Fate that makes what you have proposed so impossible."

The note would have prompted Tom to ride to Redrock in a hurry, for the sake of telling Irene again how unalterable his purpose was, and how lightly he esteemed the circumstances that seemed to her so formidable. But he learned from it that she had already gone, and so he had no choice but to wait as patiently as he could, giving a wholly unwonted attention to his planting operations for want of other occupation at a time when his books seemed no longer to interest him.

He had Irene's address, and during that waiting time he sent her many passionate let-

ters, imploring her to make the delay as brief as she could. This was an exceedingly injudicious thing to do, if, as Irene insisted, they two were presently to part for the rest of their lives. For passion grows in its intensity when wrought into words, and love letters are fierce fuel to its flame. But Tom was heedless of all such cold-blooded considerations, partly because he refused to believe in the coming separation, and still more because his passion made him reckless of all else that Fate might have in store for him if this one supreme desire of his soul was to be baffled by circumstance.

At last, early in June there came to him the long desired summons. In the fewest words possible, Irene wrote:

“If you will not be warned, you may come now whenever you please.”

Within the hour Tom was at the railway station awaiting a train that he knew would not start for two hours or more to come.

It was late in the afternoon when he found himself at the little railroad station nearest to his destination, but there was promise of a moon, according to the almanac, and as he

succeeded in hiring what seemed to be a good serviceable horse, he decided to start up the mountain at once.

The horse proved to be clumsy with his feet and twice or thrice he went down on his knees, seriously endangering both his own and his rider's necks. Then suddenly, about sunset a storm cloud crept up from behind the mountains, and within a few minutes a furious rain was drenching the rider and threatening to make a mountain torrent of the road.

Tom was well accustomed to meeting all sorts of weather without asking odds of it, but in this case he felt distinctly relieved when upon reaching a little eminence in the road he found himself in front of a human habitation. Here, he thought, he might at least take shelter till the worst of the downpour should be over, and, more important still, he might inquire his way and learn something of the streams, now swollen into torrents, that he must cross.

To his surprise a woman with her head muffled in an old petticoat and her shoulders wrapped in some nondescript cloth that looked

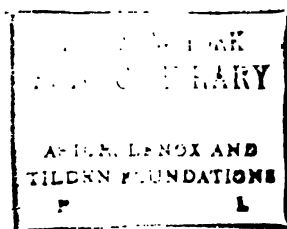
366 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

like tarpaulin, stood waiting for him at the fence. It was Judy Peters, and Judy made it a rule never to let any wayfarer pass her house during waking hours without accosting him. She had seen Tom far down the mountain at a bend in the road, of which her door commanded a good view, and she knew at about what time to expect him.

"Evenin', stranger," she said as he rode up. "'Light an' look at your saddle. Reckon you's purty well soaked, ain't you? Hurry up an' git inside the house. Sapphiry'll look arter your beast. Say —" as the girl took possession of the animal, and she herself hurried her guest into the house — "say, you's a stranger, an' 'tain't my way fer to be a mindin' of other folks's business, but it's my advice fer you not to ride that air hoss *down* the mounting, ef you don't want to be chucked head fo'most over half a dozen precipices. Perkins served you a dirty trick a givin' you that air beast. Ef I was you I'd turn him loose an' leave Perkins to s'arch fer him. That air hoss'll stumble an' fall even a goin' up hill. When he's a tryin' to go down hill



"EVENIN', STRANGER. 'LIGHT AN' LOOK AT YOUR SADDLE."
Page 366.



he mostly does it by a turnin' o' summersets, an' that ain't comfortable like fer his rider."

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Peters kept her guest standing and dripping, or was herself idle while she was saying all this. On the contrary, before her equine commentary ended she had peeled off Tom's coat and waistcoat and hung them over chairs before the fire which always burned in her stoveless kitchen chimney, in June as certainly as in January. She had also pushed Tom into a chair backwards, astride the seat and with his back to the blaze. The process reminded Tom of the way in which cooks and housekeepers "set bread to rise," and as his shirt began steaming he could imagine himself slowly swelling up under influence of the heat.

Then, with sincere hospitality, Judy brought out her bottle of old apple jack before even asking her guest's name or inquiring whence he came and whither he was bound. Those questions were inevitable, of course, and it was indicative of Judy's concern for the young man's health that she postponed them in favor of her panacea, apple brandy.

368 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"Thank you very much," he said when she pressed the liquor upon him, "it's mighty kind of you, and I assure you I appreciate your hospitality, but I never drink liquor of any kind."

"What? Not even when you's soaked clean through as you is right now tell the water's a runnin' outen the soles o' yer feet? Haul off yer boots, stranger, an' set 'em to dry, an' I'll hang yer socks where they'll drip an' steam theirselves into shape. You don't never drink no liquor? Well, that's stranger'n anything I ever heard tell. An' yit," scanning his face closely, and with manifest curiosity, "an' yit you seems healthy like. What do you do to yerself when you gits a wettin' like this to keep the cold out?"

Tom smiled as he answered, "I mostly dry myself by a fire and let it go at that."

"But what do you take to drive the cold away?"

"Well, just now I'm not a bit cold. In fact if you don't let me push my chair a little further from the fire I'll be roasted nice and brown by the time your daughter gets those

waffles cooked. How good they smell to a hungry man!"

There was no shorter road to Judy's heart than by appreciation of her table, and there was a hungry sincerity in Tom's tone which she recognized with rejoicing.

"W'y, shore enough you is most a bilin' whar you is, stranger. Shove yer chair further back an' make yourself comfortable. Sapphiry, is you a goin' to be all night a gittin' a plate o' waffles ready fer the stranger? Git away an' lem me tend to 'em while you pour the coffee. There, stranger, set by."

In the mountain parlance the injunction "set by" meant "draw up to the table." As Judy gave the invitation she placed before Tom a platter of fried salt pork with a milk gravy, a heaping plate of waffles freely buttered, a dish of baked pippins, a jug of maple syrup, a steaming cup of coffee and a pitcher of thick cream.

Tom accepted the invitation eagerly enough even to satisfy Judy's hospitable demand, for he had eaten nothing since his breakfast. As he helped his hostess and himself from the dish

before him, he was reminded by her use of the word "stranger" that he owed it to her to introduce himself.

"I beg your pardon, Madam," he said, "I've been so busy letting you make me comfortable, that I've forgotten my manners. My name is Tom Hardaway. I'm a planter, and I live down Richmond way."

"An' my name's Judy Peters, Tom," she replied, instantly using his first name in its abbreviated form, after her usual free and easy custom. "May be you's heard folks mention me."

Fortunately for Tom, who was a habitually truthful person, he remembered what Irene had told him at the time of the election a year or two before, concerning Judy's queenship and queerness, and the way in which she had carried the mountain vote for Colonel Hargreaves.

He half rose in his chair as she gave her name, and replied:

"Indeed I have heard of you, Mrs. Peters. I've heard that you are a personage of unusual influence in this part of the country, and

I've heard Colonel Hargreaves say you made him governor. I am glad and proud to meet you, Madam."

"Well, ef you mean that last you'll quit a sayin' Madam to me an' a callin' me Mrs. Peters, an' jest call me Judy, friendly like. An' likewise, as the preachers says, you'll help yourself to some more o' the meat an' another plate o' waffles. Hand 'em up hot, Sapphiry!"

Being an adaptable person and sincerely wishing to stand well with Judy, Tom promptly fell into the friendly familiarity of speech she had suggested.

"Thank you, Judy, I'll help myself. Your waffles are the best I ever ate I think, and as for the pork and milk gravy, there never was anything to beat it. And the coffee!"

Instead of uttering the apostrophe he had in mind, Tom expressed himself by emptying his cup at a draught.

"It's all in the handlin'," she answered oracularly.

"Yes, I reckon it is," he responded, "and in my opinion you know how to handle such things, Judy. Anyhow I've eaten enough for

two men, but I simply can't quit till I have a plate of the waffles, with syrup on them this time."

"Well, they's one thing shore about you, Tom. You ain't stuck up, ef you is a planter. Your clo'se is mighty fine, an' I reckon they was made by some city feller of a tailor, an' your talk is mighty like the stuck ups's talk, but I reckon you can't help that, livin' amongst 'em like, all your life, but ef you're stuck up yourself, in your innards like, w'y it's the best stuck up I ever seed. Does you like a smoke?"

"Indeed I do, Judy," he answered, producing a cob pipe. He had purposely left his meerschaum at home, lest he be suspected of ostentation. Judy furnished some good tobacco of her own growing and the two settled themselves to enjoy a quiet evening, their enjoyment of it being sharpened by the plash and patter of the rain without.

Judy had a habit of retaining suggestions in her mind when she wished to talk about them at leisure, and she had done so on this occasion.

"You spoken of Dick Hargreaves a while ago, Tom. D'ye know him purty well?"

"Very well indeed. In fact his wife is a distant cousin of mine, and I've been intimate in his house all my life."

"Then you know Irene McGrath?" she asked, scrutinizing the young man's face for a more explicit answer than she expected from his lips.

"Yes, I know her very well indeed. In fact that's what I'm here for, Judy. I'm going to visit her."

Judy meditated for a time before answering.

"'Twon't be the sort o' visitin' you's used to, I reckon. Mark's awful run down at the heel an' his wife she ain't no 'count, nohow, an' never was an' never will be. Reckon you'll find things purty rough over there, Tom."

"You forget, Judy. You just now said I wasn't stuck up, and I don't mind having things a little bit rough. You see I've travelled a good deal in out of the way places. I've even lived among the Indians for months at a time, so I know how to take things as I find them."

374 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"May be it mout be differenter in this here case. Say, Tom, is you a goin' to marry our Irene?"

The question was put at once abruptly and insinuatingly, but there was a suggestion of sincerely friendly interest in Judy's tone and manner that decided Tom to answer it as frankly as it had been asked.

"I am if I can, Judy. I've asked her, and she hasn't said yes, as yet. Now I've come up here just to ask her again."

"Why didn't you do all your axin' down there where she mostly lives? 'Twould 'a' been better, Tom."

"I did all I could, but she wouldn't give me my answer there; she wanted me to visit her up here."

"Um — I see. She's awful proud like, an' 'tain't a bad sort o' pride neither to want you to know an' not jump in the dark, like. Still it's a pity. May be arter you git to Marcellus McGrath's you won't feel so much like axin' as you does now. I've seed things turn out that away. It's a powerful pity, ca'se Irene's a mighty nice gal — the cream o' the moun-

tings, I call her, an' I like you, Tom. You's a nice feller, full o' sperit, I should reckon, an' not a bit stuck up."

"Thank you, Judy. You needn't fear. I'll ask her again, you may be sure, whatever I may find her home to be like. After all what difference does it make? If she says yes, she'll have a new home — mine — and I'll see to it that she is happy there."

"That's the way to talk, Tom. You's the right sort. Still, I wish you didn't have to go to Mark McGrath's. It mout make a difference, you know. Folks always thinks they knows theirselves, but oftener'n not they don't."

With that wise reflection Judy lapsed into a silence that endured long enough for her to fill and light her pipe. When she had it going again she said:

"Say, Tom, 'twouldn't be lucky fer you to git yer neck broke jest now, so you sha'n't ride that hoss o' Perkins's when you leave here. I've got the surest footed mule in the mountings, an' you're a goin' to ride him. I've thunk it all out. Fletch Camden's due to go

376 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

down the mounting to-morry, an' as he'll be afoot, I'll let him take Perkins's hoss an' turn him over to Perkins. You'll keep the saddle an' ride my mule over to Mark's. Then, when you git ready to go home, arter spendin' another night here on your way back, you'll ride my mule agin an' jest turn him loose at the foot o' the mountings. He knows his way home."

"But, Judy, you must let me pay for the use of your mule."

"Y'ain't a payin' fer yer supper an' lodgin' here, is you, Tom? Well, no more can you pay me fer the hire o' the mule."

"But, Judy, I may stay at McGrath's for a week."

"I'll admire at yer courage an' yer grit ef you do," she answered with a chuckle that suggested much of unpleasant anticipation on her part. "But s'posin' you stay a month? 'Twon't make no difference. The use o' that mule's my contribution, as they says at the big meetin's."

Tom had no choice but to accept. It was evident that the old queen had conceived a

very great liking for him, and it would have been as dangerous to baffle her in the expression of that sentiment as to thwart her in a vengeance. She was a child of nature, a creature of elemental passions, whose barbaric will was guided only by her impulses and could be restrained by nothing.

XXXIII

IRENE had looked forward to Tom's visit with a good deal of apprehension, — not as to its outcome, for she had fully convinced herself that it could end only as she had said, in the abandonment of Tom's purpose, — but as to what might happen to Tom himself during his stay.

As to the indications of poverty with which the place abounded, she was not at all troubled; for she had made up her mind that any feeling of shame on that account would be unworthy of her womanhood. So far as the ignorance of her mother and the half savagery of her brothers were concerned, she reflected that it was for the purpose of exhibiting precisely those things to him and pressing them on his attention that she had invited Tom to make the visit.

The dread that troubled her was that her

mother might say offensive things to Tom or, worse still, to herself in his presence, a thing that she knew would wound him more. For her mother, just recovering from her illness, was in a mood of querulousness which might lead to any sort of angry or sneering outbreak. The older woman had foreshadowed something of the kind in many ways since Irene had notified her that she expected Tom. She had asked questions about him that indicated an unreasoning antagonism. She had said things that angered her daughter and insulted her without provocation or excuse, and Irene looked forward with wondering dread of what his actual presence might provoke from her querulousness.

Thanks to Tom himself, she was spared this affliction. There was a certain gracious deference in Tom's manner toward all women, which proved to be winning even in the eyes of the irritable convalescent. There was an easy good fellowship about him that effectually put an end to Mrs. McGrath's suspicion of a purpose on his part to hold himself a superior person.

380 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

"I like that young feller o' yourn," she said to Irene before the first day of Tom's stay was ended. "He ain't a bit stuck up — wish I could say as much 'bout some other folks I know."

As this was said in private and not in Tom's presence it relieved Irene, who did not at all mind her mother's sneer at herself.

As for the rest of the family, Tom's success in ingratiating himself with them was slower, but not less complete. Having a good mechanical knack, he came to the rescue of the axe by himself repairing the grindstone frame while the McGrath boys looked on in admiration of his skill and still more of the industry and energy that prompted him to do the thing. He showed them tricks of snaring and trapping game — tricks that he had learned among the Indians, and the mention of that fact so sharply aroused their curiosity to hear at first hand something about a race of beings wilder even than themselves, that they boldly ventured upon direct questions, and before long Tom was occupying his evenings in telling them all sorts of curious and interesting

things. Even the father of the family became deeply interested in a multitude of facts that Tom was able to give him, and by the end of his second day at the place, the young man seemed to have won the friendly admiration of the entire family.

On the afternoon of the fourth or fifth day Mrs. McGrath — completely converted now to his worship — volunteered a suggestion for his entertainment.

"Irene," she said, "why don't you take Mr. Hardaway up to the mounting top? He's real nimble at a gittin' over rocks, an' I reckon may be he'll think it purty up there."

Tom so eagerly seconded the suggestion that Irene decided to make the journey that afternoon, and when all the boys clamorously proclaimed their purpose to accompany the pair, Mrs. McGrath sternly forbade.

"You all'll stay where you is," she said with decision. "'Tain't manners to push yerselves in where you're not welcome."

The boys were very reluctant to obey an injunction they did not understand, but they

knew what it meant to incur their mother's displeasure, and so they grumbly remained at home while Tom and Irene set off up the mountain.

They had not gone far before Irene began to show an exhilaration of spirit which Tom had regretfully missed during his stay in the mountains. The June day was a fine one, but so had been all the other June days since he had come, yet during all of them Irene had seemed to be carrying a burden. Now, as soon as they had climbed far enough to lose sight of the house, she seemed to throw it off completely and become her joyous half childlike self again.

"It gladdens me to see you happy once more, Irene," said Tom as they paused on top of a rock ledge. "You haven't seemed yourself since I came. Now you are Irene again."

"I'm always happy up here," she answered. Then after a brief hesitation she added, reflectively — "up here where I can forget and where I need not think of any but the best things."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 383

Before Tom could reply, and indeed as if to forestall reply, she sprang quickly to the next rock saying:

"Let's go on. The summit is so much more beautiful."

Tom followed, wondering a little but not misunderstanding.

When they reached the summit and, in the clear June air, saw what seemed to be the "whole glad world," as Irene called it, spread out beneath them, Tom stood in amazement at the grandeur and beauty of it all. Irene too was full of her own surging thoughts — too full to heed Tom's exclamations or in any way respond to them. The place meant so much to her that she could not express in words that its associations and the memories it evoked of emotions past for a time shut out the physical grandeur of the scene at least from her spiritual eyes.

Tom had the gift to perceive her mood and the tenderness to respect it. For a time he kept silence as he stood there by her side looking afar. Then he quietly walked away for a space and stood alone. It was not until she

384 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

joined him that a word was spoken between them.

"Do you think it purty?" she asked in a tone that shocked and distressed him.

"What do you mean by that, Irene?" he asked, trying to take the hand that she withheld.

"That is what my mother said, you remember."

"I had forgotten," he said, a trifle piqued. "Why do you recall her words in that way? She —"

"She is my mother," interrupted the girl. "I recalled her words and borrowed her tone by way of reminding you of that. You are apt to forget what manner of people mine are, and it is necessary for you to remember."

"Irene," he answered gravely, "you are wrong to feel ashamed of your mother and your people."

"I feel nothing of the kind. You must not make the mistake of supposing that. My people are honest and clean and brave. Why should I be ashamed of them?"

"Thank you, Irene, for saying that. It

reflects the spirit that I most admire in the woman I love. I am proud of your pride, though I think it misdirected sometimes."

"Hear me out," she said, struggling a little for control of her voice. "I said what I did for your sake, Tom, not for any shame. I wanted to warn you, as I have tried to do before. I wanted to remind you that I am my mother's daughter, that I am of her kind, not of your kind. Now that you have seen the people from whom I am sprung, you must see and understand, if you will only let yourself think calmly, that what you have thought of in connection with me is hopelessly out of the question. It would be a sin — almost a crime — for me to let you link your life with mine in the madness of your passion. I asked you to come to my father's house so that you might yourself see that, but your eyes are blinded, Tom, and you will not see, and so the task of compelling you to understand falls upon me, and, God help me! I love you so, Tom, that I cannot do that duty without tearing my own heart out and wounding yours most cruelly. Help me, Tom! Help me to

386 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

save you by going away — to-day, now, — and seeing me no more!”

For answer the young man threw his arms about her and drew her to him with caresses as gentle as those of a father.

The hardness she had summoned to her aid for the doing of what she deemed her duty could not resist the measureless tenderness of his embrace. She let her head rest upon his breast with his arms around it, and gave way to the tears she had so long restrained.

Tom was wise enough to keep silence till the paroxysm was past and she herself spoke, still letting her head lie passively upon his shoulder.

“I have tried to do right, Tom,” she said as the smiles again came to her face. “I hope I am right now in surrendering to your will, and letting you decide things for me that I can’t think out for myself. At any rate it shall always be so now.”

Then, as if suddenly remembering something, she raised her head and looking her lover in the eyes, asked:

“What will your mother say, Tom?”

In his anxiety to make as light as possible of the opposition he himself feared from that quarter, he replied playfully:

"Oh, my mother has a way of thinking in her own fashion, and then doing whatever my father tells her, or whatever I tease her to do."

"Will she accept me as a daughter, Tom?"

"Why, of course. What else can she do?"

"Don't speak so lightly, Tom, please don't. For this is very serious. Listen! I am as proud in my womanhood as any grand dame in Virginia. I will never enter a family as the bride of a son of the house, if I am not welcomed. Will your mother send for me, when she hears of this, and welcome me as the woman you intend to make her daughter? Will she treat me as she would Helen under the same conditions?"

Tom summoned all his courage and answered:

"Yes, Irene. She will do all that."

Mentally he added: "I'll make her do it or I'll break some crockery."

And Tom Hardaway was a very resolute young man, accustomed all his life to compel

388 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

both people and circumstances to his will, when he knew that his will was right.

Nevertheless as he travelled down the mountain on his homeward journey, he was sorely puzzled to guess how he was going to keep the promise he had made.

XXXIV

TOM did not tarry at the McGrath home after his conference with Irene on the mountain top. He was strongly tempted to stay, and enjoy Irene's society in the solitudes round about, now that there was no longer any barrier between them or any question of vital consequence to be determined. And now that he had made clear to her his attitude concerning her people, Irene longed to have him remain there for as long a time as she herself meant to stay. She had planned to return to Redrock within a fortnight or so, and that space of time seemed to both of them all too short for the enjoyment of their new found happiness.

But Tom — radical iconoclast that he was — felt himself bound to bow the knee to one at least of the traditions of his time, his country and his class, the tradition, namely, that

390 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

an engaged couple may not with propriety pass a night under the same roof.

"Not that I discover the smallest suggestion of sense in the requirement," he said to her, "but solely because of you, Irene. You see it might be said that you were ignorant of the customs of good society, and in that case I should have to challenge somebody, and just at this particular time I am specially reluctant to be killed in a duel."

Irene's countenance was radiant with happiness as she answered:

"It shall be as you wish, Tom. You know I told you up there," pointing backward as they clambered down from the summit, "you know I told you up there that henceforth I'm going to let you decide between right and wrong for me."

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the house, and the sun had already sunk behind the high mountain to the west, but they were agreed that Tom must leave at once. Irene was troubled lest the long night ride should involve him in difficulty and even danger perhaps, for the road down the moun-

tain ran perilously near to the edges of precipices in many places. Tom reassured her:

"I shall not go down the mountain until morning. I have already accepted an invitation from Judy Peters to pass the night at her house. She made me promise to bring her my good news."

Irene flushed self consciously for reply, and he rode away as gallantly as he could, considering that he was mounted upon a long legged mule with closely clipped mane and tail.


Tom had another reason for hurrying home in advance of Irene's return to Redrock — a reason which he was at pains not to mention to her. He foresaw that he was likely to have a good deal of difficulty in persuading or otherwise inducing his mother to receive Irene as a prospective daughter-in-law, with that degree of cordiality which he was determined to insist upon. He had no doubt that his mother would invite Irene to come to her; indeed he meant if necessary to compel that; but that was not enough. He wished the invitation to be a cordial one, at least in seeming, and he wished it to be given promptly

upon Irene's return. Otherwise there might seem to be a reluctant unwillingness about it, to which Irene might justly take exception.

"It may take some time to bring Mother around," he explained to himself; "indeed it certainly will take some time, and the fortnight's wait for Irene's return will be none too long for my purpose."

In his haste to set his negotiations going, he went directly to his father's house, without visiting his own plantation. To his sore disappointment he learned there that his mother had gone with her husband to Washington, where the elder Hardaway had a case to argue before the supreme court. The servants could not say when they would return. To the best of their belief Mrs. Hardaway intended to return within a week, and the Judge to remain longer.

There was no choice but to wait, and Tom rode away at an impatient gallop to his own place. He busied himself there for the few hours that remained of the afternoon, and that night he planned to make up some of the sleep he had been losing of late; he did so by going



to bed at nine o'clock and waking again about midnight. Finding that he could sleep no more he devoted the rest of the night to the agreeable recreation of writing a love letter to Irene, a letter so full of spirit and jollity that it rested him to write it, and so long that it took Irene a whole forenoon to read it for the first time.

. In the morning the restless young gentleman mounted and rode away toward Redrock. It would help him pass the time, he thought, to tell Helen his good news, and feel that she sympathized with his rejoicing. To his disgust he learned that Helen had accompanied his parents to Washington. Mrs. Hardaway had pressingly invited her, and she had more than willingly accepted. She was quite sure Tom would write her of his news, if she were absent at the time of his return, and for reasons which she made no effort to analyze or even to formulate, she preferred to receive his announcement in that way, rather than in his own eager utterance.

"I shall write my congratulations in reply," she thought, "both to him and to Irene.

There'll be no danger of an emotional slip in that case."

Her purpose in that respect was so fixed and strong that she carried it out, although when she received Tom's announcement there was barely time to get her letter to him before her own return. In fear that her letter might be delayed, and thus bring about the result she was trying to avoid, she persuaded Mrs. Hardaway to remain in Washington for a day longer than had been planned.

In the meanwhile Tom had so far remembered his duty as to ask Colonel Hargreaves's consent to the marriage. That gentleman and his wife were together when Tom preferred his request, and both congratulated him with sincerity, but to her congratulations "Cousin Mary" added:

"You will have trouble with your mother, Tom. I'll help you all I can, but I fear she will refuse her consent, and in that case—well, you know how proud Irene is, and how determined."

"What?" exclaimed Colonel Hargreaves, "refuse her consent? Object to our little

Irene? On what possible grounds pray, can she even think of such a thing?"

"You forget, Richard, how peculiar her views are about family, and all that, and how strongly she clings to them."

"But that's nonsense in this case. Irene's people are altogether honest and respectable, and her father was a schoolmate of my own. Besides Irene is in effect our daughter, and I don't think anybody can accuse us of not belonging to an old family, or a whole bunch of old families for that matter. Why, we're related to pretty nearly every old family in the commonwealth."

"*We* are, Richard, but Irene is not, and I very gravely fear Matilda will insist upon the difference."

"If she does," exclaimed Colonel Hargreaves, "I'll bowl her prejudices clear off the green by legally adopting Irene. She's still under age. I'll do that, by Jove, and I'd like to see the person, man or woman, who would think of our daughter as an unfit match for the son of the proudest family in all the land."

396 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

The old gentleman was so excited that he paced the floor as he spoke.

“But what about Irene?” asked his wife. “She could not fail to know of the objection made to her, and she is not the kind of girl who would enter a family unwilling to receive her, even if their unwillingness were overcome in the way you suggest.”

Tom had listened in silence to the discussion. He now rose and in a tone and words that neither of the others could interpret, said:

“I shall marry Irene with the full and cordial consent of my family—or I shall have no family, henceforth and forever.”

With that he took his leave.

XXXV

IN his restless impatience to make an end of perplexing suspense, Tom went to Richmond and met his mother and Helen at the train where the Fredericksburg railroad came to a frazzled end in the middle of Broad Street, as if it had grown tired of looking for a station or even a platform at which to stop.

So far as hurrying matters was concerned of course his journey to Richmond was quite futile. He could not hold up his mother there on the cobble stones and ask her to do her duty by inviting Irene to be her guest in recognition of his engagement to her. But the journey helped him to get rid of his last day of waiting, and that was reason enough for making it. "Besides," he reflected, "women have a way of loitering on a homeward jour-

ney, as if time were nothing to them—as usually it is—and it would be just like Mother or Helen or both of them to have a headache and decide to go to a hotel for the night. In that case—well, anyhow, if I am there and the carriage is waiting for them they're more likely to forget about the headache and go straight on home."

Tom's mother did complain of headache and weariness when he helped her from the train, but she had no thought of going to a hotel. Tom, seeing how weary she really was, himself suggested that course, but Mrs. Hardaway answered:

"It's nice of you, Tom, to be so considerate of me, and it's nice of you to have the carriage here; but I've been living in a hotel for ten days and I've had quite enough of it, sleeping in a bed that dozens of other people have occupied and having my meals served to me in little dishes all round my plate, just as if they were rations or doses of medicine. No, we'll go straight on home, and I'm going to keep Helen with me overnight. You needn't come with us, Tom. It's only sixteen miles to drive

— or twenty, I forget which — and we'll get there in time for dinner. Oh, I know you're anxious to have a talk with me, but that must wait. You can ride over from Osmore tomorrow morning, and I'll be ready for you. Good morning now."

That was the first intimation Helen had received of the fact that the mother knew of the engagement, and it gave her an opportunity. As a part of the heroic renunciation she was practising, she longed to do what she could to smooth the way for Tom, but until now she had not felt free to refer to the subject even in the remotest way. She had not known that Mrs. Hardaway was aware of the facts, and she shrank from the thought of being the first to inform her.

"That is Tom's privilege," she thought.

But now she was free to speak and she did so. On the homeward journey she sang Irene's praises, but apparently to deaf ears, for Mrs. Hardaway answered scarcely at all and such response as she did make was equivocal.

At last Helen, after her practical fashion,

400 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

decided to force some kind of reply that should at least indicate her companion's attitude of mind.

"Do you know," she said, "I'm delighted, for Tom's sake, that he is to marry Irene. It seems so entirely fit and it will mean so much of happiness for both."

"I cannot so regard the matter," replied the elder lady, with her face repellently hard. "On the contrary, it seems to me so exceedingly unfit that I mean to prevent it, if Tom, in his infatuation with the girl has any respect left for his mother's feelings, or if the girl herself has pride enough not to force herself upon a family in which she is not wanted. For I shall decline to receive her as my son's prospective bride."

Helen's fighting temper was aroused, and, without a moment's hesitation she said:

"If you do that, Cousin Matilda, you will do the cruellest and most unjust act of your life. Irene has pride enough, you may be sure, and if you persist in your present determination, she will never marry Tom. But Tom has pride also, and a spirit which not even his

respect and affection for you can subdue. If you do what you have said you intend, you will alienate him beyond recall, and worse still, you'll wreck and ruin his life. You will put an affront upon him such as he will not endure, and he will find ways of resenting it which will make you repent of your mistake, in sack-cloth and ashes, and all to no purpose. For no repentance will ever seem to him an atonement for an insult to Irene. And he is right. He loves her; he has asked her to be his wife, and in that way pledged himself forever to protect her against the world."

"But you forget, Helen; I am not the world; I am his mother."

"So much the more reason is there why you should not challenge his antagonism and force him into an attitude of undying resentment, by an act that will outrage his sense of honor, affront his manhood, and wound his soul unto death."

The elder woman made no response. She sat still, with no sign of relenting in her countenance. After a half minute of silence, Helen said:

"You do not answer me, Cousin Matilda."

"Why should I? The affair is my own. I know my duty, and I shall do it."

"Then please let me out of the carriage, Cousin Matilda. We're passing the outer gates of Redrock."

"But you're going home with me, Helen."

"I was, but I'm not. You have told me of your purpose to do this thing, to destroy Tom's happiness and ruin his fair young life for the sake of your own senseless prejudice; worse still, you have told me of your intention to put the worst imaginable affront upon Irene, whom I have made my sister, — to treat her in the same way that you might if she were a shameless, soiled, lost woman, and that in the face of the whole community. I cannot make myself a party to such an enormous outrage, even in seeming. I cannot be your guest so long as you contemplate that, and I will not be your guest again while I live if you carry out your purpose. Stop the carriage, Jerry."

They were at the entrance gate to Redrock plantation, and heedless of the elder woman's

protestations and entreaties, the passionate girl stepped from the vehicle, shut its door, gave a hurried direction to Jerry, and literally ran toward her home till she passed over the brow of a hill and was lost to view.

Mrs. Hardaway was bewildered by the suddenness and the violence of Helen's outbreak. She had never suspected the usually placid and sweet-tempered girl of such capacity for passion. Worse still, she did not know what now to do. Her impulse was to drive at once to Redrock, but she dreaded a repulse at Helen's hands which would make the situation even worse than it was. She dreaded, too, an encounter there with Colonel Hargreaves, whose sympathies and convictions, she knew, were all opposed to her own, and whose affection for Irene was scarcely less intense than that which he felt for Helen herself.

As she hastily debated in her mind what course to pursue, she was shocked to see Jerry removing Helen's trunk and other belongings from the carriage.

"What are you doing that for, Jerry?" she asked angrily.

"Miss Helen she done tole me to," he answered with the stolidity that was habitual to his obedience.

"When did she tell you?"

"Jes' 'fore she runned away, Missus. She done said: 'Put my things on de groun', Jerry, — I'll sen' for 'em,' or somethin' like dat."

"Very well. Drive on," she answered with a dignity that felt itself outraged. She could not and would not bend to the whim of a "mere chit of a girl" no matter what might happen. But as the carriage toiled on over the weary miles, she could not drive out of her mind the wondering thought of what might happen. What would Tom really do when informed of her fixed purpose? She could not even conjecture. She had anticipated his futile anger and disappointment, with a reconciliation of some kind to follow after a time. But Helen's words had suggested that something more, something very much worse and far less reparable, was likely to result. For the first time she realized that a family quarrel might be the outcome, a quar-

rel so bitter that everybody would talk of it in whispers and with wagging heads.

Then too she wondered what her husband's attitude would be in the matter, and the thought of that gave her no comfort. And if Helen was so outraged and angered at the mere anticipation of what she felt that she must do, what would Colonel Hargreaves and Mrs. Hargreaves, and all the rest of her dearest relatives and friends, say and do when the thing was actually done?

At the end of her drive Mrs. Hardaway was fully convinced that she was a sorely aggrieved person, who — merely because she was resolute in acting upon her convictions and in loyalty to the traditions in which she had been bred — was destined to have all her friends turn against her and leave her a lonely martyr to duty and exalted principle.

She wept a little as she pictured her coming desolation, and on the whole she found a good deal of melancholy satisfaction in the prospect.

But she remembered that she must face Tom on the morrow, — and there was no element of satisfaction in that.

XXXVI

TOM lingered in Richmond for some hours after the departure of his mother and Helen. He had some business to attend to with his commission merchant and at bank, and by attending to it on that day he shortened the time of waiting.

After leaving the city he decided to stop at Redrock and pass the night there, instead of going on to Osmore. Redrock was some miles nearer his father's house than his own place was, and as he must go to see his mother in the morning that was a consideration. But chiefly he was moved by a desire for human society. It would be lonely, he knew, to stay at Osmore during the waiting time, while at Redrock he would have "Cousin Richard," "Cousin Mary" and the little girls to entertain him and make the hours pass pleasantly.

To his astonishment, Helen was the first to greet him on his arrival there. In response to his surprised inquiry, she answered:

"I have quarrelled with Cousin Matilda, Tom."

"Not seriously, I hope?"

"Yes, very seriously. It depends upon her whether we shall ever be reconciled or not. It was all about you, Tom, — and Irene. Your mother is contemplating a cruel wrong, and I have told her so. Oh, Tom, you're going to have trouble! And poor Irene! I'm sorry, and I've done my best. What will you do, Tom, when your mother refuses to accept her, and she refuses to marry you against your family's wish?"

"Let us hope it will not come to that," he answered. "I may be able to induce my mother to change her mind. If not —"

He suspended his sentence, in mid-air as it were, and Helen eagerly took it up:

"If not, what? Oh, Tom, you won't let anything part you from Irene? You mustn't give her up!"

There was passionate pleading in her voice

408 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

as she said the words, and there was rejoicing in her countenance when Tom answered with prompt decision :

“ Whatever happens, I will cherish Irene and love her while I live. If she refuses me because of my mother’s unreasonable prejudice I’ll try to persuade her to a better way — ”

“ And I’ll help you, Tom,” interposed the girl, who was manifesting an enthusiasm such as he had never known her to show before. He could not guess the reason, nor could Helen herself have told at the moment why she so passionately desired Tom’s happiness and Irene’s, but during the watches of the night she explored her own soul and discovered there the reason, though she found it too subtle for her analysis. She saw only the fact that her renunciation of self had brought its own reward of peace and joy; that she had completely conquered her passionate love and transfigured it; that she no longer loved Tom in the old way, but wholly as a brother now, and that the event, the very thought of which had made her heart ache before, had become

to her now the greatest longing of her life. The discovery brought an abiding peace to her spirit, a peace that no other joy could have equalled in its delight.

In the early morning she talked with Tom again and urged him to caution in his coming interview with his mother — caution lest any hasty word should stimulate her antagonism and baffle hope.

Tom promised, but added :

“ If my mother yields, all will be well; if she refuses to yield she will bitterly repent her obstinacy throughout her life.”

He offered no explanation of his words, and Helen asked for none. Probably she feared to ask lest the answer grieve her more than the suspense.

When Tom arrived at his father's house, his mother was awaiting him in the darkly shaded parlor, and in accordance with her orders previously given, he was asked to join her there.

He greeted her gently and cheerily, in spite of his foreknowledge of her purpose, for he was determined that whatever the outcome

410 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

might be, no fault should be his as a subject of future self-reproach.

"Mother," he said, "I have news for you in which I hope you will find pleasure. Perhaps you have guessed it already. Irene has consented to be my wife."

He paused for an answer, but there was none.

"I have come to ask you, Mother, to send for Irene, and to welcome her as my chosen bride, after the usual custom in such cases."

"Your respect for custom seems a trifle belated, my son. It has never been a custom in our family for our young men to seek their brides elsewhere than within the circle of —"

"Pardon me, Mother, if I ask you not to raise that subject for discussion. You and I talked it out at Osmore only a little while ago. Neither of us can have anything new to say about it, and we shall not come nearer to an agreement by reason of any discussion we may now hold."

"You are right, my son. My mind is fully made up and it cannot be changed. I will not

ask Irene McGrath to be my guest as the affianced bride of my son."

"Is that final?" he asked, calmly but with features set and hands clenched until the nails wounded the palms.

"That is final," she answered without a tremor.

"Regardless of the effect of your decision upon my life?"

"Regardless of everything," she answered.

"Allow me to say that you will regret your decision."

"I am the best judge of that," she said.

"Perhaps so. I do not think it. You have not considered the consequences of your decision."

"Yes, I have, my son. I have considered them well, and —"

"You do not know what they are to be, Mother. You have no dream of them. If you had, it would be a nightmare. Good-by!"

A moment later he quitted the house without looking back, and at the neighboring station he boarded a train for Richmond.

Up to the time of his hasty departure Mrs.

412 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

Beverly Hardaway had been proud of herself, proud of the obstinacy she miscalled strength of character, proud of the prejudice she mistook for principle, proud of the cruelty she was so wantonly practising in the name of Duty. But when he had gone, a number of troublesome questions presented themselves, demanding an answer that she could in nowise give.

What were the consequences to be in very fact? Why had Tom said that even a dream of them would be a nightmare? What had he meant by that? And what had his singular calmness and self control meant? She had expected him to plead, to entreat, perhaps even to threaten so far as he could within the limits of propriety. Instead he had accepted her assurance that her refusal was final, without passionate protest of any sort. She was disappointed in that, for she had cherished the hope that in resisting his pleading to the last she might additionally show that "strength of character" on which she so greatly prided herself. She was not only disappointed therefore, but a good deal frightened also. She

knew her son's resoluteness — she called it obstinacy when it opposed itself to her will. She knew his resourcefulness in the search for means with which to accomplish his purposes. She did not know what he would do in this case, and the fact troubled her greatly.

Her quarrel with Helen, if it might be called that, seemed a thing of trivial consequence now in comparison with the perplexity she felt over the possibilities in Tom's case. Helen would forget and forgive.

But Tom had gone, and she could not follow him. She must wait with what patience she could, for how long a time she could not conjecture.

Altogether, for a woman proudly conscious of having done her duty under trying circumstances, Mrs. Beverly Hardaway was a very unhappy person.

XXXVII

MRS. HARDAWAY had not long to wait in anxious uncertainty as to what Tom would do under the circumstances she had herself created. But when he did it she was worse puzzled and more apprehensive than before.

When she opened the next number of her semiweekly Richmond newspaper, almost the first thing she saw there was this advertisement, printed conspicuously:

“FOR SALE IMMEDIATELY, Osmore plantation, three thousand acres, nearly one thousand in fine timber; old colonial house, good barns, stabling and quarters; growing crops of wheat, corn and tobacco, all in fine condition; orchards in full vigor; plantation well watered by three creeks and four spring branches. ALSO FOR SALE: the full outfit of

horses, mules, cattle, hogs, and agricultural implements, including reaper and threshing machine. As the owner wishes to effect an immediate sale, he will make a heavy concession in price to a prompt purchaser. Apply by letter or in person to

“THOMAS HARDAWAY.

“Address,” etc., etc.

Mrs. Hardaway read this with consternation, and her alarm was increased when a visitor came to say that a similar announcement was posted on the Court House door and in other public places in the county, and to ask what it meant. Everybody knew that Tom Hardaway was the one planter in that region who was never in debt and whose accounts in bank and with his commission merchant always showed a comfortable balance on the proper side. Moreover, it was known that he had recently bought a considerable interest in the Haxall Mills and another in the Tredegar Iron Works, paying for both in cash.

Why did a man so comfortably well off advertise his old inherited plantation home for

416 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

sale? And why was he so anxious to sell quickly as to offer a heavy concession in price for promptitude of purchase?

And what about his negroes? There was no mention of them in the advertisement, and everybody who knew Tom was satisfied that he would never think of sending negroes — especially inherited, family servants — to the auction block to be sold off South. Wherefore everybody was puzzled, and nobody more so than Mrs. Beverly Hardaway, although she knew as nobody else did, that whatever it was Tom meant to do had been prompted by her own decision not to receive Irene as a prospective daughter.

She fell at once into a condition of terror, distress and frenzied apprehension. She repented bitterly, but she feared her repentance had come too late. She saw clearly now that her own course had been dictated only by a foolish pride and an obstinacy unworthy of a reasonable human being, and she told herself these truths with a candor and emphasis more merciless than any that her worst enemy would have had the heart to employ.

"I have been a fool," she said as she wandered uneasily about, unable to sit still or in any other way to rest. "Yes, I have been a fool. I have recklessly trifled with the most sacred things of life. I have set my prejudices above Tom's happiness. I have risked the love of my only son for the sake of a false pretence, an idiotic vainglory. Irene is in every way worthy — the fittest woman possible to be Tom's wife and to make him happy. The worst of it is that I have known that all the while, and have made a wreck of everything just for the sake of indulging my pride, my prejudice, my obstinacy, my foolishness. I will go to Osmore at once and tell Tom all that. I will humble myself before him in the hope that it is not yet too late to avert the calamity, whatever it is, that he intends to bring about. I will entreat his forgiveness, and I will do whatever he asks me to do. I'll start early in the morning — before breakfast. Even then I may lose my chance by being too late. Some 'prompt purchaser' may be spending the night there, and they may close a bargain before I can get there."

418 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

A sudden thought occurred to her :

"I won't wait for morning. I'll go to-night. The roads are good now, and Osmore is only ten miles away. I'll go at once."

At that moment her husband, whose return she had not expected for several weeks to come, entered the house.

"I've had a letter from Tom," he said by way of explanation, "and I've hurried home in consequence."

"Oh, tell me what he says. What does it all mean? What is it he's doing?"

"I think you, my dear, are the person best qualified to answer at least one of your questions, and say what it all means."

"Yes, Beverly," she replied in humility born of her repentance. "It means that I have been wrong and wicked and that I am to be punished for my sins."

Then she told him of her interview with Tom, and of Tom's strange saying, adding :

"The nightmare has come — and the worst of it is that it isn't a dream, but a waking reality. Oh, Beverly, what shall I do, what shall I do? I must go to Tom — at once, to-

night, now. Order the carriage, please, while I get some wraps. I'll entreat Tom to forgive me. I'll humble myself before him. I'll do what he wants. After all it is right and I wanted to do it all the time. I think I only wanted to be forced to do it. That was my abominable pride again, and Tom didn't even try to force me. He just told me I would repent what I was doing, and made that strange remark about the nightmare, and then went away. Oh, Beverly, *do* you think it is too late? And you haven't ordered the carriage yet!"

"Calm yourself, Matilda, and let us think what can be done. You can't drive to Osmore to-night, and it would do no good if you could. I'll ride over there in the morning, and you can follow later. I think that will be best. You see we don't know what it is that Tom is planning to do. He didn't tell me in his letter."

"His letter? I had forgotten that. You mentioned it before. Oh, tell me what he said."

"Here is the letter," he responded; "you

may read it if you choose. It is very strange in parts."

She read:

"MY DEAR FATHER: My mother inflexibly decrees that I must give up my honor, my plighted troth — all that I value in life — in obedience to her will, or cease to be what I have always been, a son of the house of Hardaway. It is a hard choice, but I have not hesitated to make it. I am arranging my affairs as speedily as I can, so that I may cease to be a Hardaway — tied hand and foot by tradition, convention, and prejudice — and become a free man again, free to live my own life in a land where men have emancipated themselves somewhat from the bonds that chafe my soul beyond endurance.

"I shall leave Virginia forever within the fewest days possible, and I want to take an affectionate leave of you before ceasing to be your son or anybody's son, and making myself the sole head of my own family. I understand that you are likely to be detained in Washington for several weeks. If you will

let me know where to find you there, if such is the case, and if not, will send me a line saying where else you will be at some specified time, I will be at pains to see you and say farewell, as is your due, and as my affection for you prompts.

"It is not necessary to enter into details as to my plans, further than to say that I wish to place in your hands before I go away certain interest bearing securities for my mother's use in case of need. Their sum is sufficient to provide her with an adequate income for life in case of your death. I desire to effect this now, for the reason that when once the ties that have bound me to the old life are severed, I wish never again to have occasion to remind myself of them by entering into communication with any one connected with that old life.

"I offer no explanation of the course I am pursuing, because none seems to me necessary. The fact that I am a free man and desire to remain free so long as I live, is explanation enough to one like yourself, who cherishes a like impulse of manhood and personal liberty.

Please send an immediate reply to Osmore, where I shall be compelled to remain for a few days more — as few as I can make them."

Mrs. Hardaway read this missive over and over again, trying, as it were, to wrest from it some explanation that it did not hold, some hint that it did not give. The fact that even in his desperation he remembered her with the old affection and planned to provide for her the means of meeting any emergency life might bring to her, touched the tenderer side of her nature till it ached in agony. As she laid the letter down at last, despairing of discovering Tom's purposes between its lines, she again pleaded frantically for permission to go to her son at once.

This her husband resolutely refused.

"It might do great harm and it can do no good," he explained. "Before this matter is dealt with emotionally, it must be examined rationally, and you, Matilda, are just now even less capable of viewing things rationally than you were when you provoked the present situation by setting your — let us say your im-

pulses — above your judgment and your affection. I will ride over to Osmore after breakfast to-morrow. He will expect me, as I sent him a telegram from Washington telling him of my coming. If you receive no message from me by twelve o'clock, forbidding you to come, you may start at that hour. In the meanwhile, I shall have learned all the facts, and, so far as possible, prepared the way for you."

The half-frantic mother found it exceedingly hard to reconcile herself to an arrangement that involved so much delay and suspense, but she had had her lesson in the matter of self assertion, and had learned it well.

XXXVIII

JUDGE HARDAWAY was accustomed to approach every matter of consequence with deliberation and a calmly judicial mind. He avoided haste as a source of danger in all matters requiring thought, and especially in matters that involved possible emotion on his own part and still more on the part of the person with whom he had to deal. It was his effort in every such case so to manage the conversation as to secure as calm and unexcited a statement of affairs as possible, before discussing them in any way.

When he reached Osmore, therefore, he was at pains to preserve an outward seeming at least of business-like coolness, to ask Tom such questions as he must without manifesting feeling of any kind, and without offering comment upon the facts before he knew completely what they were.

Tom was equally anxious that their conversation should be a dispassionate one. He welcomed his father cordially and affectionately.

"I'm more than glad you have found it possible to see me here, Father. It will be easier here, to tell you whatever you may wish to know of my plans and purposes, and to take leave of you — easier than in Washington or anywhere else away from home."

"I felt that, Tom," answered the elder man, "and I should have come to you on receipt of your letter, even if it had cost a greater disturbance in my professional affairs than it has. As it is, I have to-day free, and as I must return to Washington to-morrow, perhaps we'd better have our interview now and get it over. Will you mind telling me, in your own way, what has happened, and what it is you intend to do? I know only that — on the whole it will be best to regard me as knowing nothing whatever. Such information as I have, apart from that given me by your own letter, may be colored and biased by an emotional disturbance bordering upon frenzy."


"Poor Mother!" Tom interjected, "believe me, Father —"

"Let us get at all the facts, my son, before we let our feelings intrude themselves upon attention. Suppose you begin at the beginning, and tell me all that has happened."

"I will, and that is best. To begin with, a while ago I found myself in love with Irene McGrath — more passionately, more deeply, more enduringly in love than I had ever imagined myself capable of being in the case of any woman. Surely, Father, you who know her will understand how —"

"Pardon me, my son, if I insist upon excluding all emotion from this part of our conversation, avoiding all expressions of opinion, and devoting ourselves exclusively to the setting forth of facts."

"You are right, of course. That was our understanding, and I didn't mean to depart from it. Well then, I declared my passion to Irene, and with her admirable candor — her resistless impulse toward truth — she admitted her love in return. But, in her self sacrificing honesty, she —"



"Avoid comment and adjectives and adverbs, my son, till your statement is finished. There will be time for such things afterwards."

Tom, accepting the reminder in good spirit, proceeded briefly and baldly to tell of the conditions Irene had imposed, of his mother's visit to him, of his journey to the mountains, and of the results reached there.

"Irene and I are fully engaged — subject to one condition which she makes imperative, and which I can easily understand that a sensitive, self-respecting young woman must insist upon. Indeed I should have insisted upon it myself if she had not."

"You have not told me what the condition is."

"Simply that if she marries me it must not be upon the mere sufferance or unwilling consent of my family — which in such a case means my mother, at least to the young woman. She insists that she cannot marry me unless my mother shall signify her approval of my choice in the usual way, by in-

428 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

viting her to be her guest as my prospective bride. When I asked Mother to do that, she insistently refused. I sought to give her opportunity to change her resolution — perhaps for my sake — but she declared her decision to be final and unalterable. In effect, her decision was that I must give up Irene, cancel an engagement I had myself with difficulty persuaded her to make, become a faith-breaker and a poltroon, or find some way of ceasing to belong to a family which refuses to receive and welcome the woman I love. I made my choice without hesitation, and I shall abide by it.”

“Do you mind telling me what your decision is?”

“It is to cease to be a member of the family I was born into; to become another man, the head of my own family, and forever to remove myself from a society in which senseless tradition and arrogant assumption still have power to make wreck and ruin of men’s and women’s lives.”

“You have forgotten our pact about the use of adjectives, Tom. Recall it, and tell

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 429

me, if you are willing, precisely how you intend to accomplish what you have suggested."

"I shall sell Osmore — probably upon an offer received by mail this morning. I shall place in your hands the securities of which I wrote you — they are in the bank vaults. I shall place a considerable sum of money in Cousin Richard's hands, as trustee for Irene — but without letting her know anything about the fact until — until I shall have made her my wife in my new personality as a man of no family, or shall have failed in my efforts to persuade her to that."

"What will you do with your servants?"

"Take them North and set them free, on little farms or in little shops of their own. It's the only thing I can do, under the circumstances."

"And then?"

"Then I shall entreat Irene to become Tom Hardaway's wife, and go with him to the great West."

"And if she refuses?"

"If she refuses it will be because I still be-

430 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

long to a family that refuses to welcome her
I will remedy that, quickly."

"How?"

"By having my name legally changed."

"Do you seriously mean that, Tom?"

"I was never more serious in my life."

"Are you sure Irene will yield to your entreaties then?"

"No. She is proud, and has a right to be so — the right of her womanhood."

"In case of her final refusal, what will you do?"

"I'll go farther, into the wilder regions of the West, and sink the last traces of my identity among the trappers, miners and Indians. I hope I shall not be forced to that, but my plans are fully made to fit every possibility, and I shall not falter."

"Apart from present conditions, apart from the situation created by your mother's refusal of your request, do you really desire to quit the old life, changing your skies and mind?"

"Certainly not. I love the old life; I love Virginia; I was bred in the ways that prevail

here and are found nowhere else. The life of a planter fits in perfectly with my temperament, and gives me both the physical and the intellectual conditions I need. But what is the use of regretting it? I must live a free man if I am to live at all. I must order my own life in my own way. If I cannot do that here I must go elsewhere. If conditions here interfere with my individuality, my liberty, my manhood, I must seek or make other conditions at whatever cost or sacrifice. It isn't a matter of choice—I am under a moral compulsion as resistless as if it were physical."

"I fully understand your feeling, my son," said the father calmly, "and of course I sympathize with your impulse to make any sacrifice in behalf of your liberty, your personality, your individual manhood. I should think ill of you indeed if you did not feel so. It seems to me, however, that you might have found less radical, less extreme ways of accomplishing your will to be free. However, it is not my purpose to criticize. You may be right in thinking the measures you have

432 IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS

decided upon to be the only effective ones open to you."

He paused a moment, looking at the old clock that stood in a corner of the hall. Then he said:

"I think I will ride over to Redrock now, if you'll order my horse. I will not say farewell yet as I intend to come back in time to dine with you if I may."

"I shall be delighted," answered Tom, whose deep and abiding affection for his father was the bond that it distressed him most to sever. "I'll expect you about four, and we'll try to forget that is the last time we are to break bread together on earth."

The young man turned his face away to hide his feeling, and the elder man mounted. As he was about to ride away, he turned about in his saddle to say:

"It is possible that your mother will drive over some time to-day. If so, I trust you will receive her kindly, Tom."

"Of course. How can you doubt that. She is my mother and I do not accuse her of intending to do me wrong. She has done

only what she believes to be right, and while I cannot and will not submit myself to her prejudices, I — ”

The rest of the sentence was lost to Judge Hardaway, as his horse bore him rapidly away.

His mission at Redrock was an invention, of course. He had kept watch upon the time and knew that his wife must soon come. His delicacy prompted him to absent himself, so that there might be no witness to an interview between mother and son, under circumstances so emotionally trying. In justice to both also, he had refrained from telling Tom of his mother's repentance and purpose of reparation. It was her right, he thought, to tell of that herself, and his right to hear it first from her.

The carriage drove up not long after Judge Hardaway had ridden off, and in her half-frantic state of mind Tom's mother fairly threw herself into his arms, pouring forth a stream of penitential regrets, protestations, entreaties, lamentations and self-accusations, which the young man sought in vain to check. In her effort to say everything at once that she

had to say, she created a confusion that only one who knew her as Tom did could have understood at all. He managed to make out two things clearly — that she repented of her hardness of heart, and that she was passionately eager to make atonement. With this much made clear, the young man was anxious to spare his mother all self reproach, all humiliation possible. As soon as he could compel her attention he commanded:

“Listen, Mother! Listen to me! I want you to quit calling yourself names which I would never allow anybody else to call you. No, don’t interrupt me. I don’t want you to beg my pardon or to accuse yourself of wrong doing. I sincerely give you credit for having acted only in obedience to your convictions. If you see things in a truer light now — ”

“Oh I do, Tom! And the worst of it is — ”

“Wait, Mother! I don’t want to hear the worst of it; I want to hear only the best of it, and you’ve told me that already — that you accept Irene, that you will invite her to be your guest and receive her cordially as my

prospective wife and your daughter. I desire to hear no more."

Seizing some papers over which he had been working he tore them to fragments in almost boyish glee, crying out:

"Hurrah! Osmore plantation is not for sale. It is to be again and always the family seat of the Hardaways. Mother, you have made me the happiest man on earth."

"How I rejoice in that!" she exclaimed. "Now, Tom, give me directions for finding Irene in her home in the mountains, for my atonement is only half made. I'm not going to send her an invitation — I am going in person to her to entreat her to come to me."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Mother. It is not fit or right. I will not let my mother humble herself. You shall receive Irene only in a way befitting your age, your dignity and your position. Irene herself would not have it otherwise, and she would never forgive me if I permitted anything different. I shall myself go after her to-morrow, and bring her to Redrock. You may send your invitation to her there. You may make it as cordial as you

please, but mind, I shall quarrel with you and so will Irene, if you put into it any word or phrase of apology. It is as my mother, the wife of my father, a gentlewoman of the best lineage and highest breeding, that you are to receive the woman who is to follow you as the feminine head of our family."

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It was November, and the beautiful Indian summer possessed and glorified the earth and the air, when Tom and Irene returned to Osmore after their long wedding journey to the cities of the North. The two — master and mistress of Osmore now — stood together in the porch looking out upon a landscape shrouded in soft purple and gold.

"Tom," said Irene after a joyous silence, "do you remember what you said to me that night of my first ball — about the flowers, you know?"

"Yes, I remember."

"What did you mean by it, Tom?"

"I meant what I said — and something more."

IRENE OF THE MOUNTAINS 437

Silence fell again between the two, but it was the silence of content and peace.

Presently Tom said:

"I mean it still, Irene — I shall mean it always."

THE END.

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